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A Comparative Analysis of Training, Mentoring and Coaching in the Sales Environment: Evaluating the Impact of Personal Learning on Role Ambiguity and Organizational Commitment

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
TRAINING, MENTORING AND COACHING IN THE SALES ENVIRONMENT:
EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL LEARNING ON
ROLE AMBIGUITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT
by

Shalonda K. Bradford

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The content and format of the dissertation are appropriate and acceptable for the awarding of the degree of Doctor of Business Administration.

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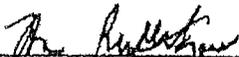
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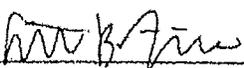
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ABSTRACT

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The move towards a more knowledge-intensive sales market has increased the complexity of the sales job. Salespeople must continuously learn and grow to meet the evolving demands of the job. A critical concern for organizational leaders becomes identifying learning strategies to encourage salespeople to apply what they learn. Researchers have advanced multiple studies on the learning needs of salespeople, yet there is not a consensus as to the most effective mechanisms to increase learning transfer in the sales environment. To determine which knowledge tools better prepare the sales force for success, this study investigates whether training, mentoring and/or coaching is more effective in increasing sales learning transfer. A framework which incorporates multiple established transfer and training evaluation models is considered. Empirical testing on a sample of frontline salespeople across varying industries was performed, with statistical analysis of the results. Decreased role ambiguity and increased organizational commitment was interpreted as evidence of transfer. The findings of the study will bolster knowledge of the factors that increase personal learning and promote learning transfer which can ultimately improve the salesperson's performance.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The sales team is perhaps the most empowered department within many

organizations, and the revenue generated by them is critical to the success of most

companies (Jones, Brown, Zoltners, & Weitz, 2005; Churchill, Ford, Walker, Johnston,

& Tanner, 2000; Williams & Attaway, 1996). One reason individuals are attracted to

positions in sales is because of the advancement opportunities these careers offer

(Johnston & Marshall, 2009). Salespeople work as boundary-spanning employees

(Singh, 1993), often operating in a minimally supervised (Weitz & Bradford, 1999),

almost entrepreneurial capacity while establishing and developing business relationships

(Jones, Roberts, & Chonko, 2000). These employees have substantial contact with

customers (Singh, 1998) requiring firms to entrust them with their most valued asset

often while maintaining little direct control over the process.

An increased focus on relationship and consultative selling combined with the

ongoing turbulence in the sales arena has caused more executives and organizational

leaders to recognize the importance of workplace learning (Tanner, Ahearne, Mason, &

Moncrief, 2005). To avoid becoming obsolete, salespeople must be groomed to succeed

(Harris, 2001); their knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) must be updated, and they

must continually learn and grow (Jones, Chonko, & Roberts, 2003). Sales managers are

thereby confronted with the need to improve the KSA's of their salespeople (Chonko,

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Jones, Roberts, & Dubinsky, 2002) while identifying ways to help their salespeople learn (Attia, Honeycutt, & Leach, 2005). Often, this grooming is accomplished through investments in sales knowledge tools (Harris, 2001), e.g., training, mentoring, and coaching. To maintain a competitive edge, salespeople must build partnerships and practice techniques to sustain long-term customer relationships. While improvements in sales outcomes have been linked to both customer satisfaction and increased market share (Ahearne, Jelinek, & Jones, 2007), there is limited insight into the tools that are most appropriate in developing and cultivating specific transfer outcomes over time. As such, the goal of this study is to identify which knowledge tools have the greatest influence on role ambiguity and organizational commitment through increased learning in the sales environment.

1.1 Measuring Training Effectiveness

Heightened customer expectations have increased the complexity of the sales job (Jones et al. 2005; Marshall, Moncrief, & Lassk, 1999). Customers expect their salespeople to have the ability to share knowledge, respond quickly to requests, and provide personalized service with customized solutions that meet their needs (Jones et al., 2005; Lassk, Ingram, Kraus, & Di Mascio, 2012). It is predicted that the need for collaboration both internally and externally will become progressively more essential in order to garner continued success in the sales profession (Lassk, Ingram, Kraus, & Di Mascio, 2012). Doing so requires the development of deeper, longer-term customer relationships (Lassk, Ingram, Kraus, & Di Mascio, 2012; Tanner, et al. 2008).

As the modern economy moves towards a more knowledge-intensive business model (e.g., Ahrol & Kotler, 1999; Adler 2001; Dean & Kretschmer, 2007) innovation is shaping customer expectations and customers are far more savvy than in times past. These environmental pressures from customers as well as employers make it necessary for salespeople to continuously adapt to meet the evolving demands of the job. In this regard, the topic of training has garnered attention from academics and practitioners alike (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010; Johnston & Marshall, 2005; Little, 2012).

Training has long been used as a practice to increase employee performance and improve behavior (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Pfeffer, 1998). Training expenditures have become a more significant part of the operating budget in many organizations, and the most successful organizations are reported to spend more on developing their employees than do other organizations (Kraiger, 2003). It is estimated, for example, that companies within the United States spend $15 billion annually training their sales force (Salopek, 2009). In fact, the costs associated with sales training activities can exceed $2,000 per initiative (Sales and Marketing Management, 2005) with the development of a single salesperson exceeding $100,000 over the course of their career (Dubinsky, 1996; Johnston & Marshall, 2006).

According to a 2010 industry report by the American Society for Training and Development, American businesses spend $129.5 billion dollars annually on developing their workforce and devote more than 32 hours annually to training (Patel, 2010). Yet, although the importance of training is being highlighted, there is also increasing criticism of the expense of sales training expenditures and the effectiveness of these initiatives

(e.g., Lassk et al., 2012; Weeks & Stevens, 1997; Wilson, Strutton, & Farris, 2002). With organizations making such hefty financial investments in training, there is growing demand that the money spent on training expenditures be justified in relation to an organizational performance metrics, i.e., increased profit, improved processes, gains in market share, or greater productivity (e.g., Huselid, 1995; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2002). The focus is shifting to identifying strategies to ensure training costs are evidenced as an investment in human capital as opposed to an inherent business expense. As a result, management is often left in a position of weighing the benefits of launching a training initiative against the costs associated with implementing it.

Historically, documenting the return of investment (ROI) of learning activities has been a daunting task for organizations (Lassk et al., 2012). Post-training evaluations often indicate little or no significant differences in the application of training with minimal long-term effects on certain organizational objectives (Blume et al., 2010; Broad, 1982). Furthermore, few organizations have ever attempted to measure the impact of mentoring and coaching activities. Thus, it appears corporations make such considerable investments in these initiatives, yet often there is little measurable change in the application of the new skills when the employees return to work (Ricks, Williams, & Weeks, 2008). While there is budding evidence that these investments may yield results that can positively affect performance (Birdi, Patterson, Robinson, Stride, Wall, & Wood, 2008; Taylor, P., Russ-Eft, & Taylor, H., 2009; Tharenou, Saks, & Moore, 2007), there is a need to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence as well as those that may restrict the application of newly learned skills in the workplace.

1.2 The Transfer Problem

A key consideration for organizational leaders is determining a mechanism to encourage the sales force to apply what is learned in a way that translates as improved behavior and results in the workplace (Holton, 2005). In beginning to unravel the amount of time and financial resources firms should invest in tools to prepare salespeople for success, this research will allow for a better understanding of the factors that motivate salespeople to apply newly learned skills and behaviors to their work environment. By definition, training transfer (also known as learning transfer) is the extent to which a salesperson applies the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired in training on the job (Kirkpatrick, 1996). Failure to achieve transfer can stifle results which undoubtedly limits the return on substantive investments made by these firms (Anthony & Norton, 1991; May & Kahnweiler, 2000; Burke, 2007; Wilson, et al., 2002).

In order for transfer to manifest as positive sales outcomes, the knowledge must be learned and retained (Kirkpatrick, 1996) and the salesperson must be intrinsically motivated to transfer the learning (Holton, 2005; Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Chan, 2005). However, only about 10% of the dollars spent on training will actually translate into positive changes in the workplace (Georgenson, 1982). Further, only 15 out of 100 people actually apply what they learned in way that leads to increases in performance (Brinkerhoff, 2006). Wexley and Latham (2002) report estimates that no more than 40% of content is transferred immediately following training; reporting the rate of transference falls to 25% after six months and 15 % after one year. Saks and Belcourt (2006) suggest a much greater rate of initial post-training transfer, yet similarly report that transfer

diminishes by as much as 50% within a year. Furthermore, it is estimated that between 60%–90% of job-related skills and knowledge acquired from learning programs is not being implemented at all on the job (Phillips & Phillips, 2007).

The literature suggests that measurable training returns (e,g., ROI, performance increases, gains in market share, increased profit, improved productivity) are often not realized. However, in most cases the impact is not clearly known. There is little documentation as to the overall benefit companies receive as a result of learning activities in the sales environment (Attia et al., 2002; Dubinsky, 1996; Ricks, Williams & Weeks 2008; Salas & Cannon-Bower, 2002; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). Therefore, this study will take a process perspective to see if the learning outcomes that drive performance in the sales environment are being met. Specifically, this study will examine training, mentoring and coaching for insight into which tool is most effective in helping salespeople reach the desired outcomes through the transfer of learning.

1.3 Sales Knowledge Tools

The learning transfer phenomenon has been investigated for decades (e, g., Baldwin & Ford, 1998; Brinkerhoff & Montesino, 1995; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Bates, & Holton, 2007; Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993; Yamnill & McLean, 2005). Extant literature suggests that in order to sustain an effective operation in today's business environment as well as solidify a position for success in the future, organizations must commit to establishing learning programs that focus on a complete range of sales competencies, not just task-related knowledge, skills, and abilities. Lambert, Ohai, and Kerkhoff (2009) presented 29 foundational competencies that drive sales success. "The

foundational competencies needed include communicating effectively, setting

expectations, negotiating positions, articulating value, and embracing diversity" (Salopek,

2009, p.70).

Learning programs must also include a developmental plan for continued learning

(Cron et al., 2005). The process should encourage the ongoing usage of the learning by

equipping the sales professional with the skill set necessary to deliver adequate company

and product knowledge (Jackson & Hisrich, 1996) and the opportunity to cultivate and

demonstrate the newly learned skills over time. However, the most current

comprehensive reviews of transfer have found conflicting results on the factors that lead

to successful transfer (Blume et al., 2010; Cheng & Hampson, 2008). The exception

appears as managerial support (e.g., coaching) and peer support (e.g., mentoring) which

have consistently been suggested as influencing training outcomes (Baldwin & Ford,

1988; Clarke, 2002; Dubinsky, 1996; Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Weiss, Huczynski, &

Lewis, 1980).

In one of the most commonly cited studies on transfer, Baldwin and Ford (1988)

discuss the use of buddy systems as a method to achieve transfer. Burke and Saks (2009)

later determined lack of accountability is the missing variable and the reason for learning

transfer success; learning did not transfer because it fell into a grey area (Esque &

McCausland, 1997) where no one in the organization was responsible or accountable for

its success. Other scholars have found sufficient evidence suggesting the coaching and

support given from a supervisor or manager is perhaps one of the stronger factors

influencing transfer (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Clark, 2002; Dubinsky, 1996). These

studies provide insight into a common occurrence in successful training transfer. That is, the interaction and feedback provided by sales managers, as well as the communication from supportive peers play a role in advancing learning outcomes (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Clarke, 2002; Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Weiss, Huczynski, & Lewis, 1980).

1.4 Proposed Transfer Outcomes

Organizational commitment is characterized as employees' willingness to contribute to organizational goals (Meyer & Allen, 1991). A climate conducive to learning and transfer is important because when employees have access to resources they become more committed to their job and perform better (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Salespeople who identify with organizational goals exert a different level of effort in activities supporting those goals (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Increased levels of organizational commitment are especially important in the sales environment as organizational commitment and performance have been found to have a stronger relationship for salespeople than non-sales employees (Jaramillo et al., 2005).

Given the independent nature of most sales positions, with fewer opportunities to engage with supervisors and co-workers, it is reasonable to postulate that many of the benefits of the organizational learning resources may go unrealized causing these employees to feel ill prepared to perform the duties of their job. This disposition is characterized as role ambiguity; it occurs when salespeople do not believe they have the information needed to adequately perform their jobs (Churchill et al., 2000).

Salespeople that experience role ambiguity express feelings of uncertainty about how to carry out certain tasks, what is expected of them in different situations, or how

their job performance will be evaluated (Churchill et al., 2000). If a salesperson perceives that barriers exist which unfairly impede their advancement, (i.e., lack of preparation or inadequate knowledge), it could affect their overall levels of affection toward the organization. In turn, the organization may incur additional costs as the result of diminished productivity and increased turnover (Ragins, Townsend, & Mattis, 1998). In personal selling, such outcomes are commonly associated with lower levels of organizational commitment (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Marshall, 2005; Schwepker, 2001).

The intricacies of a boundary-spanning role such as sales, along with the apparent lack of a consensus on factors leading to successful learning transfer, together magnify the importance of continued research in this area. Yet, despite the heightened interest in learning and transfer, there is little empirical evidence available concerning the effectiveness of learning in the sales environment or the impact learning has on sales outcomes (Churchill et al., 2000). In fact, few studies, focus on how learning and the transfer of learning is actualized with an outcome of organizational commitment.

Role ambiguity presents a potential barrier to meeting performance expectations and negatively influences employees' motivation and morale (Artis & Harris, 2007). The result can be detriment to job outcomes such as satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment (Babin & Boles, 1998, Brown & Peterson, 1993; Churchill, Ford, Hartley, & Walker., 1985). Thus, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the effect sales knowledge tools (mentoring and coaching) have beyond that of sales training as mechanisms for improving outcomes post-training. Specifically, role ambiguity and

organizational commitment will be examined as outcomes in relation to the transfer of learning in the sales environment.

1.5 Research Questions

Organizations can benefit greatly from adopting management practices that effectively prepare their salespeople to perform in the role while at the same time reducing feelings of role ambiguity and increase organizational commitment. This is especially cogent considering salespeople are often the primary revenue generators for their firms. As front line customer-contact employees, the sales team is often the only employees within the organization who come in direct contact with customers.

The acquisition of new knowledge is recognized as learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). It is documented that learning facilitates changes in attitudes and behavior (Sheehan, 2004), and these changes beseech improved performance (Kaczmarczyk & Murtough, 2002) and increased sales outcomes (Attia, Honeycutt, & Leach, 2005). Thus, to accomplish the purpose of this study, the following research questions will be addressed:

1) What attention (delivery) methods, including type and quantity, are most effective for facilitating the learning (reproduction) of the sales role?

2) What types of learning (reproduction) lead to attitudinal and behavioral changes and generate decreases in salespeople's role ambiguity and increases in organizational commitment (transfer outcomes)?

3) Do intrinsic factors (i.e., motivation) moderate the relationships between delivery methods, and learning?

Figure 1 provides a general overview of the constructs being considered in this study.

1.6 Figure 1- Theoretical Model

The Effect of Knowledge Tools on Learning Transfer in the Sales Environment

Knowledge Tools   Transfer   Outcomes[1]

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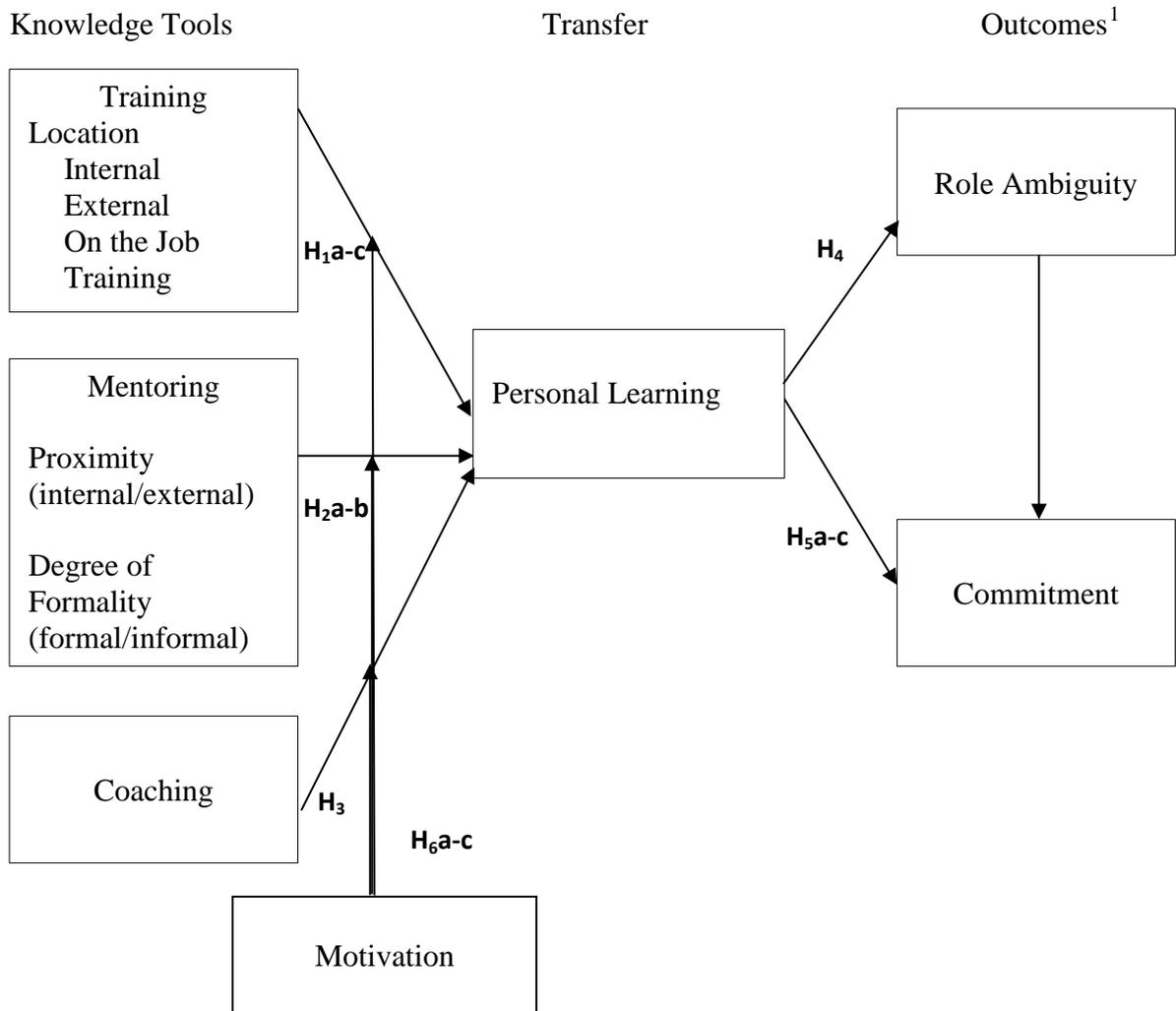
[1]A linkage between role ambiguity and commitment is examined as a control.

1.7 Contributions of the Study

The transfer of training is considered one of the most significant factors influencing organizational level outcomes (Kozlowski, Brown, Weissbein, Cannon-Bowers, & Salas, 2000) thus, research question one will allow organizations to evaluate whether the intended benefit of their instructional strategy and knowledge tools are being realized by way of measureable outcomes. By answering this research question, firms will have an opportunity to assess whether the training they provide their salespeople actually transfers into workplace changes or if the transfer happens more successfully with the support provided by a mentor and/or a coach. This knowledge would help decision makers understand the environmental factors in the workplace that promote the transfer of training and best practices that may help salespeople apply newly acquired skills on the job.

The answer to the second research question will provide firms insight as to whether a difference exists between the transference of learning that occurs based on the type and quality of the tools provided to salespeople. As a result, executives can identify best practices and develop plans to design and implement programs that will improve training transfer and ultimately lead to greater returns on training investments. A firm's routine disregard for these factors may result in systemic waste of both the organization's human and financial resources.

Finally, this research will contribute to extant literature by offering insight as to how ongoing coaching and mentoring efforts might produce positive energy toward the

application of workplace learning thereby increasing the probability that the benefits of training will extend to performance outcomes that can be felt on an organizational level.

1.8 Organization of the Study

      This study is organized to provide the reader with foundational information by which they may gain a better understanding of the problem with the transfer of learning in the sales environment and greater recognition as to why the subject should be examined further. Chapter 2 will begin with a brief definition of the constructs investigated. This discussion will be followed by an overview of the evaluative framework; the framework will be used to assess the learning that occurs as a result of the knowledge tools provided to salespeople. At the close of the chapter, role ambiguity and organizational commitment will be reviewed as outcomes mediated by the transfer of learning.

      The third chapter discusses the methodological approach for the study. Chapter 3 will outline the design of the study including the specific questions that will be addressed. The third chapter also details the process for gathering the information needed to explore these topics, and explains how the data will be analyzed. Chapter 4 will provide results of the analysis of data in this study. Included in fourth chapter are also the results of the hypothesis testing. Chapter 5 will follow with a discussion of the results, managerial and theoretical implications of the findings, concluding with directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review & Hypothesis Development

2.1 Overview

This section presents the foundational strategy and theoretical framework for this research. The current study will examine mentoring, training and coaching as substantial variables in carrying out an examination of the transfer of learning in the sales environment. Mentor support, in this study, will be considered similar to that which may be offered by an experienced colleague/peer or industry expert. Coaching support is defined as that which may be provided by a manager, supervisor or any person with immediate authority over the employee. Ultimately, in the current study, transference will be viewed as the learning or reproduction that occurs as a result of the selected attention method, i.e., training, mentoring and/or coaching. Changes in outcomes (role ambiguity and organizational commitment) will be viewed as outcomes of the transfer of learning.

2.2 Theoretical framework.

The early interest in transfer research focused on understanding how learning in one arena might translate into learning in another (Thorndike, 1933). Transfer researchers subsequently adapted their reviews to identifying ways to improve the application of

workplace training, (Goldstein, 1974) and these effects of training appear as actionable

changes leading to positive sales outcomes and improved organizational results (Holton,

2000; Kirkpatrick, 1996). In that regard, the current research will investigate learning

transfer using the Social Learning Theory as the theoretical framework for the review

(Bandura & McClelland, 1977).

2.3 Social learning theory

According to Social Learning Theory (Bandura & McClelland, 1977), behavior is

influenced by an individual's environment and personal characteristics. That is, a

person's behavior, environment, and personal qualities have a reciprocal effect on each

other. The authors use these complex behaviors of reciprocal determinism to help

illustrate the interactive effect of various factors of learning.

The Social Learning Theory suggests that the subject must pay attention to the

characteristics of the modeled behavior in order to learn. Individuals must then retain the

details of the behavior and have the ability to recall and reproduce it later. In

reproduction, a personal response must be associated according to the behavior that is

being modeled. Bandura et al. (1977) go on to suggest that regardless of the presence of

previous factors, a person must have motivation in order to actually reproduce the

behavior.

The evolution of the sales field has placed a strain on organizations to determine

the type of sales focused tools necessary to gain the attention of their employees and

support the paradigm shift (Wilson et al., 2002). Decision makers sometimes falsely

assume that salespeople will immediately reproduce the newly learned skills post-training

(Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Yet, the sales literature suggests salespeople will often abandon their new ideas and knowledge because of fear that the new way will not lead to results compared to techniques that worked in the past (Churchill et al., 2000). Some may choose not to use new ideas because they lack motivation to do so (Noe & Schmitt, 1986). As a result, there is increased emphasis on determining an approach for delivering the information in a manner that improves the salesperson's proficiency and behavior (Churchill et al., 2000).

2.4 Construct overview

      2.4.1 attention/knowledge tools.

The recent tenor in the business environment has immensely changed the role of salespeople. Relationship building and consultative selling have become more significant in the current business climate than the feature, advantages and benefits approach to sales which was prevalent in the past (Lassk et al, 2012). Consequently, those responsible for advancing organizational learning are now challenged to address the specific skills associated with developing customer relationships and managing customer accounts.

To maximize the benefit of sales training activities, the goal should be to provide learning that results in a behavior change and the trainees' subsequent application of the new skill in the workplace (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Hall, 2005). Yet, findings in the sales and sales management literature suggest sales force training programs often fail to deliver the outcomes and benefits promised, (Churchill et al., 2000) and many times a disconnect exists between the design of the training program and the eventual success of the

salesperson (Churchill et al., 2000; Honeycutt et al., 1993; Kerr & Burzynski, 1988; Wilson et al., 2002).

Honeycutt et al. (1994) record the following as being the most significant issues salespeople report in regard to these initiatives:

1) Inadequate preparation for the introduction of complex sales skills because prerequisite skills are not addressed. For instance, if a trainer mistakenly demonstrates topics out of sequence, salespeople are less able to learn the proper application of skills;

2) Failure of sales managers to follow- up. Salespeople may lack the certainty to apply the material if they have not fully mastered the skills. They may need coaching and follow- up from their supervisors to reinforce the new training;

3) No reward for practicing the newly trained skill. Without something to incent the salespeople to employ the new knowledge, salespeople acknowledge many times they return to the previous way of doing things.

As a result of ongoing efforts to ensure training benefits are actualized as improved outcomes in the workplace, researchers have advanced a plethora of literature on training transfer over the past 20 years (e.g., Alliger, Tannenbaum, Bennett, Traver & Shotland 1997; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Barnett & Ceci, 2002; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Holton, 1996; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001), but there is substantial disparity in the findings within those studies (Cheng & Hampson, 2008).

One of the first empirical studies investigating the transfer of learning was Huczynski and Lewis (1980). These researchers found several conditions that were

positively correlated to transfer. Of the forty-eight respondents studied, 35% (17) attempted to use what they learned in training when they returned to the workplace. Moreover, those who tried the newly learned skills had discussed the training with a supervisor or peer prior to and after attending the training. Huczynski and Lewis' (1980) research sheds light on the importance the transfer climate, or organizational climate as it is sometimes referenced in the literature.

Transfer climate is an individual's perceptions of various aspects of the work environment including supervisor support, peer support, and opportunities to use newly learned knowledge and skills on the job (Denison, 1996; Holton, Bates, Seyler, & Carvalho, 1997; Huczynski & Lewis, 1980). Past studies on transfer climate have yielded inconsistent results (Machin & Fogarty, 2004; Tracey et al., 1995). However, more recently, measures including variables for supervisor and peer support have more consistently indicated that transfer climate directly influences training transfer (Holton et al., 2007; Lim & Morris, 2006; Sookhai & Budworth, 2010). Each study measured transfer climate using a different measure, however, all included items assessing the level of support offered to the individual in transferring the trained knowledge and skills. This suggests that employees in a supportive transfer climate are more likely to transfer learning.

2.4.2 training.

Training is the systematic acquisition of KSAs that lead to improved performance (Grossman & Salas, 2011). Scholars have explored multiple variables including pre-training, in-training and post-training climate as well as various environmental factors including varying instructional techniques and learning principles (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2004), self-management and relapse prevention strategies (e.g., Tziner et al., 1991; Wexley & Nemeroff, 1975) and goal setting techniques (e.g., Gist et al., 1990; Brown, 2005).

The *Annual Review of Psychology* has printed six comprehensive reviews of the training literature conducted over the past thirty years (Campbell, 1971; Goldstein, 1980; Latham, 1988; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992; Wexley, 1984) documenting how the examination of training has evolved over the years from focusing on identifying theory (Tannenbaum et al., 1993, Cannon-Bowers et al 1995), to the evaluation of training objectives (Kraiger et al., 1993), evaluation of training outcomes (Colquitt & Simmering, 1998, Martocchio & Judge 1997), and the examination of instructional design/delivery techniques (Kozlowski et al., 2000). Of these, the Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) framework outlines the conditions that may affect the training environment and influence learning including factors that affect the transfer of skills post-training content (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1995).

In one of the most highly cited studies in the field, Baldwin and Ford (1988) identify factors that lead to long-term application of acquired skills and suggests training inputs such as (a) trainee characteristics, (b) training design, and (c) work environment

work in concert with training outputs and conditions of transfer. At the time of the

Baldwin and Ford (1988) review, training delivery/design was the input factor that had

garnered the most considerable research. They reported a vast amount of empirical

research on transfer has been focused on the incorporation of learning principles as a

strategy for improving the design of training programs.

Baldwin and Ford were particularly critical of the body of research that existed

during the time of their 1988 review, primarily concerned with the usefulness of the data.

They offered a position as to why practitioners and organizations were not using research

findings to improve on-the-job performance in organizations. The first viewpoint they

extended was literature added little value to trainers interested in increasing positive

transfer citing Gagne (1962) and Wexley (1984) as agreeing with this position. The

second was, many times trainers fail to apply existing scientific knowledge suggesting

Hinrichs (1976), as a researcher in support of this view. As a result, they concluded "the

limited number and the fragmented nature of the studies examining transfer are disturbing

by themselves, a critical review of the existing research reveals that the samples, tasks,

designs, and criteria used limit even further our ability to understand the transfer process"

(p. 86). This led them to provide a recommendation that future researchers take a more

eclectic approach to transfer by investigating a number of other factors that industrial-

training researchers neglected.

As organizations work to offer programs that will lead to a greater degree of sales

force competence and enhance sales performance, technology and cultural differences

become more apparent. The emergence of computer and networking technology has

changed how information can be shared and how training knowledge can be delivered (Tanner et al., 2005). Firms are now challenged to move toward more specialized training platforms (Cron et al., 2005). This is evidenced as the traditional methods of delivery such as classroom lectures and training seminars are being replaced with more high-tech instructional designs including computer simulations and distance learning modules (Zhang et al., 2004).

Sales training programs have four fundamental principles: (*a*) relevant information is covered and necessary concepts are presented; (*b*) the KSAs to be learned are clearly presented (*c*) trainees have the opportunity to practice the learned skills; and (*d)* feedback is given to trainees during and after practice (Wilson et al., 2002). The sales literature suggests the most effective delivery methods are relevant, cost-effective and content-valid (Honeycutt et al., 2001). However, networking technologies have changed how salespeople communicate both internally and externally, opening the door for third party training organizations to deliver specialized skill training and providing an alternative to organizational sales trainers (Lassk et al., 2012). Although these enhanced technological capabilities have created the opportunity for organizations to diversify by providing personalized learning support, even the best instructional strategy does not guarantee the content will transfer in a way that will either substantiate the expense or produce desired outcomes (Van Buren & Erskine, 2002).

Compounding the issue even more, despite the progress being made in the field, the outright contradictions in the training research make it difficult for organizations to determine where to focus their resources (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Grossman & Salas;

2011). In an attempt to reconcile conflicting findings in existing literature, Baldwin and

Huang (2010) completed an extensive meta-analytic review of eighty-nine empirical

studies to harmonize disparate findings. After including confidence intervals and making

corrections to the estimates and measures of variability in the correlations, they were able

to ascertain more accurate inferences of the strength of relationships and consistency of

the findings. Their study provides clarity on how predictor variables (e.g., motivation,

learning outcomes, transfer climate) influence the transfer of training. However, despite

multiple qualitative reviews and a long history of training research, they suggest that

mixed findings and the lack of empirical synthesis remains an issue within the literature.

In this study, we will delineate the multitude of delivery factors identified in

extant training literature utilizing a bundle approach to categorize the delivery method in

general terms (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). A bundle encompasses a broad, higher-level

effect than what can be determined by focusing on distinct characteristics (Becker &

Gerhart, 1996). We will explore training outcomes referencing them in terms of the most

common sales training delivery methods (Roman, Rui, & Munuera, 2002). In doing so,

we conceptualize training delivery groupings similar to the description in Roman et al.'s

(2002) review of the literature. These groupings include internal training -training

activities run by company trainers, external training -training activities run by providers

outside the organization (Churchill et al., 1997; Jackson & Hisrich, 1996; Ingram et al.,

1997), and on-the-job training -training that occurs while fulfilling actual job duties

(Chang, 2003). We will investigate internal training, external training and on-the-job

training as knowledge (attention) tools that would influence transfer of learning

(reproduction) and ultimately affect the salesperson's work outcomes of role ambiguity and organizational commitment.

2.4.3 mentoring.

Mentoring is defined as an interpersonal exchange between a senior experienced person (mentor) and a less experienced junior person (protégé) in which the mentor provides support, direction, and feedback regarding career plans and personal development (Haggard et al.; 2011; Russell & Adams, 1997). Mentoring relationships involve frequent interaction between the mentor and the protégé with a goal of enhancing the protégés competencies and aiding in career advancement (Haggard et al., 2011). These relationships have been investigated from various aspects including the role of mentors (Noe, 1988), benefits of mentor relationships (Donner & Wheeler, 2001; Scandura, 1992; Scandura & Lankau, 2002), functions of mentors, (Brashear et al., 2006; Pullins & Fine, 2002), results of mentor relationships (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Hartmann et al., 2013; Hunt & Michael, 1983) as well as the negative aspects of mentor relationships (Scandura, 1998).

The sales environment offers a unique domain in which to evaluate the effect of mentoring on learning transfer (Bagozzi, 1990) as salespeople work with less oversight (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Singh, 1998) and endure more physical, social, and psychological separation than do other professions (Dubinsky et al., 1986). Salespeople have also reported multiple issues with sales training programs (Chonko et al., 1993; Honeycutt et al., 1994; Lassk et al., 2012) with lack of follow-up and organizational support for applying the new skills as their chief concerns. Despite this, sales research

has been limited in the examination of mentor relationships (Brashear, Bellenger, Boles, & Barksdale, 2006; Fine & Pullins, 1998; Hartmann et al., 2013; Pullins & Fine, 2002; Pullins, Fine, & Warren, 1996).

Perhaps the most significant review of the effectiveness of mentoring in sales is the longitudinal study conducted by the Life Insurance Marketing Research Association (LIMRA). The LIMRA studies were reported by Silverhardt (1994) and compared agencies with formal mentoring programs to those without any mentoring activities. Insurance agents who were part of a formal mentoring program sold and retained more policies at the end of the study period than those who were not mentored. The mentored agents also had lower turnover than the agents who were not in the mentoring program.

Fine and Pullins (1998) assessed eight functions in sales mentoring relationships identifying five sets of mentoring behaviors as:

• Developing personal selling skills by describing mentoring related specifically to sales aspects of the job (e.g., sales planning or completing paperwork)

• Counseling which assesses the degree to which the relationship provides socio-emotional support

• Providing exposure which involves helping the protégé meet people and become more visible with tasks

• Coaching which relates to promotion and advancement issues not specifically tied to the sales role

• Role modeling whereby the protégé learns by imitating or identifying with the mentor.

A mentor's work in developing selling skills of a protégé is actually beneficial to all parties. Zey (1984) describes the "mutual benefits model," with mentors, protégés, and organizations all receiving benefits from the mentoring process. As noted by Ragins, Cotton, and Miller (2000), protégés receive psychosocial support such as increased self-esteem, identity, confidence and socialization. Mentoring helps protégés derive career related benefits such as role clarity, protection, promotion, increased compensation, career development, and increased job satisfaction (Kram, 1985). Similarly, mentoring has been found to not only improve the protégés performance but increases the mentor's performance as well (Pullins & Fine, 2002). The benefits for the mentor include career and social recognition, increased power, personal skill development, and leadership development (Burke & Mckeen, 1997; Messmer, 2003). The organization ultimately benefits from increased organizational commitment and employee retention as well as improved organizational communication and productivity (Darwin, 2000; Ragins et al., 2000).

The mentoring literature provides evidence of the need to examine boundary conditions to better understand mentoring's impact on protégés (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2005; Chao, Walz & Gardner , 1992; Haggard et al., 2011; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). The source of the mentor (e.g., internal mentor or external mentor) is one such condition. Although mentoring is viewed primarily as an intra-organizational occurrence, (e.g., Chao, 1998) the trend in the current business environment is for employees to work for many organizations during the course of their careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Kram & Hall, 1989; Sullivan, 1999). Thus, access to potential mentors

is not limited by organizational confines. In boundary-less positions (Arthur &

Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan, 1999) and presumably boundary-spanning careers such as

sales, it is especially plausible that inter-organizational mentoring relationships will

develop. As such, our interest in the current study is to determine if there are differences

in the amount of learning transfer that occurs for protégés in mentoring relationships with

mentors employed by the same organization (internal mentors) as compared to protégés

in mentoring relationships with mentors employed by a different organization (external

mentors).

The mentor's classification (e.g., internal or external; formal or informal) is

another distinction which can significantly affect the dynamics of the mentoring

relationship and consequently impact the mentoring benefits. Formal mentors are

traditionally the result of organization-initiated programs in which administrators, after

assessing the employees' needs and competencies, create mentoring partnerships based

on compatibility. These initiatives typically have established goals and the mentoring

outcomes are measured against specified criteria (Gaskill, 1993; Douglas, 1997). By

contrast, informal relationships tend to spontaneously develop based on interpersonal

connections and perceptions of mutual competence, (Kram, 1983, 1985; Allen et al.,

1997) attributes, attraction and similar interests (Haynes, 2003).

The Life Insurance Marketing Research Association studies identified benefits of

formal mentoring in the sales environment, yet evidence of informal mentoring programs

in the sales environment is sparse. Informal mentoring occurs quite often in the sales

environment, however, the goals are usually not specified making the outcomes harder to

measure which likely contributes to the limited empirical data available (Brashear et al., 2006). Thus, an additional contribution of this study is to examine the mentor's classification (formal or informal) as it relates to personal learning and the outcomes of the protégé.

In this study, we will examine the degree of formality (i.e., formal/informal) and the proximity of the mentoring relationship (i.e., internal/external) as factors that influence the transfer of learning in the sales environment. Given the sparse availability of information available on sales mentoring relationships, more research is needed to understand how a salesperson's behavioral and/or attitudinal outcomes relate to their mentoring status. By understanding which of these relationships most often leads to increased personal learning, organizations can channel resources in a way that will allow protégés to get the most out of the experience, thereby increasing the organization's return on investment.

2.4.4 coaching.

Coaching is defined as a process of improving performance by focusing on correcting problems with the work being done (Fournies, 1987). Researchers have also defined coaching as a process of empowering employees to exceed established performance levels (Burdett, 1998; Evered & Selman, 1989). Coaching refers to the practice of teaching an employee about the rules, goals, and politics of the organization (Richardson, 1996). While closely related, mentoring and coaching are conceptualized differently. Despite the disagreement on the exact distinctions between the coaching concept to counseling, mentoring, or teaching, the general sentiment is that mentoring is

relational involving a developmental relationship between the parties; whereas coaching is functional (Snow, 2009) and exists due to the organizations' need to maintain performance standards. Moen and Allgood (2009) assert a mentor may coach, but a coach is not necessarily the employees mentor (Parsloe, 2000). As such, many companies expect their managers to coach their subordinates as a required part of the job (Snow, 2009).

Coaching helps the learner personalize the teaching material and make links from theory to practice or from abstract examples and study material to real-world challenges the individual learner might face (Hill, Bahniuk, Dobos, & Rouner, 1989). This interaction is most often confined to the formal supervisor-subordinate relationship and focuses on developing the employee in their current position (Parsloe, 2000). The support employees receive from their managers has consistently been found to influence the application of newly learned skills and is reportedly one of the more powerful variables in successful transfer (e.g., Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Clarke, 2002; Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Martin, 2010; Weiss, Huczynski, & Lewis, 1980). This is likely the reason that the most broadly studied aspect of transfer climate is supervisor support (Burke & Hutchins, 2007).

The extent to which supervisors provide support and reinforcement for the use of training on the job is defined as supervisor support (Holton et al., 2000). The importance of the supervisor's role in the training transfer process is one of the key findings from Huczynski and Lewis' (1980) transfer research. These scholars found that of the participants who experimented with newly learned skills after training (in contrast to not

using the training at all), 48% had discussed the training with a superior—usually their immediate supervisor—prior to attending training. In those cases where the employees applied the newly learned behavior and sustained it over time, the immediate supervisor engaged in supportive behavior 70% of the time. Based on this, Huczynski and Lewis conclude that attempts to introduce new skills have a higher chance of being successfully implemented when the effort is supported by an immediate supervisor.

A vast amount of transfer research has advanced over the years, yet the impact supervisor support has on the transfer of learning remains unclear. Many studies suggest a direct relationship between supervisor support and transfer (Austin, Weisner, Schrandt, Glezos-Bell & Murtaza, 2006; Saks & Belcourt, 2006). Others, however, suggest supervisor support influences transfer indirectly (Chiaburu, Van Dam, & Hutchins,, 2010; Nijman et al., 2006) or not at all (Devos, Demay, Bonami, Bates, & Holton., 2007). Given the increased attention of the subject, several researchers have tried to qualitatively synthesize what is known about the subject (e.g., Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Baldwin, Ford, & Blume, 2009; Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Cheng & Hampson, 2008; Cheng & Ho, 2001; Merriam & Leahy, 2005; Yamnill & McLean, 2001). Baldwin and Ford (1988) considered transfer as a chief concern for both researchers and practitioners, thus, recommending additional empirical work be undertaken. The authors suggest that environmental characteristics, such as supervisor support, be more precisely isolated and examined in conjunction with other factors in order to more accurately evaluate the effectiveness of the delivery method and increase desired outcomes.

This study will consider coaching as a function of the salesperson's direct supervisor in determining the influence these activities have on learning transfer in the sales environment. In this study, we will examine the influence of the direct supervisor's coaching and feedback on the salesperson's personal learning and work outcomes. We will evaluate the relationship between these factors and their effect on the transfer process.

2.5 Learning overview.

Industrial literature suggests a distinction be made between education and learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Education is documented as an activity designed to cause changes in the knowledge, skills, and abilities of individuals. In contrast, learning emphasizes who will make the change in order to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities. In this study, learning will be considered evidence of the individual's acquisition of knowledge, skills, or competencies which contribute to individual development. Lankau and Scandura (2002) described this as personal learning and includes interpersonal competencies of self-reflection, self-disclosure, in addition to active listening, empathy, and feedback.

2.5.1 personal learning.

Personal learning is defined as acquired knowledge, skills, or competencies which lead to the growth and development of an individual's interpersonal competencies (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Personal learning involves an individual gaining insight into their own strengths and weaknesses, an awareness of identity and values, as well as an understanding of their developmental needs, reactions, and behavior patterns (Higgins

& Kram, 2001; Kram, 1996). The underlying premise of personal learning is that

individual's learn automatically through actively working with others. As mutuality and

interdependence become more common within boundary-less careers (Arthur &

Rousseau, 1996), the boundary of workplace teaching and learning is less clear

(Hall,1996; Liu & Fu, 2011). The implication is that individuals in today's modern sales

environment should develop their skills through continuous learning experiences which

may span multiple positions and possibly multiple organizations (Liu & Fu, 2011).

Individuals with elevated levels of personal learning have the ability to continuously

learn from others regardless of their rank or position (Lankau & Scandura, 2007).

Personal learning is divided into two dimensions: relational job learning and

personal skill development (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Relational job learning is

defined, in this study, as the increased understanding about the interdependence or

connectedness of one's job to others. In other words, learning in the context of how an

individual's work is related to the work of others. The second type of personal learning

is labeled personal skill development and relates to the employee's development of

interpersonal skills that would make for a better working environment (Lankau &

Scandura, 2002). Employees develop personal skills through interacting with others,

active listening, and solving problems in social contexts.

Research has shown that several variables influence learning including

organizational (i.e., culture), individual (i.e., goals) and task (i.e., task interdependence)

(Dweck, 1986; Guberman & Greenfield, 1991, Karambayya, 1990). From a theoretical

perspective, the transfer of learning happens when new knowledge and skills are learned

and executed in a way that is different from that of prior knowledge (Taylor, 2000). The

transfer of training/learning is considered the degree to which the knowledge, skills, and

abilities acquired in training is applied to the job (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Transfer is

conceptualized as the extent the salesperson is capable of reproducing the learned

behavior. Failure to achieve transfer can stifle results and undoubtedly limit the return on

a significant investment of time and resources made by firms (Anthony & Norton, 1991;

Burke & Hutchins, 2007; May & Kahnweiler, 2000; Wilson et al., 2002). For the

purposes of this study, the terms training transfer and learning transfer will be used

interchangeably.

Tannenbaum et al. (1992) provide a framework that outlines in detail the

conditions that may influence learning including factors that affect the transfer of skills

and post- training content (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1995). It has been found that

interaction of major variables in the organizational climate and culture, such as

supervisor sanctions, peer support, and performance feedback, is necessary in order for

learning to successfully transfer into positive work-related outcomes (e.g., Baldwin &

Ford, 1988; Colquitt et al., 2000; Holton et al., 1997; Noe & Schmitt, 1986; Tracey et al.,

1995). Conversely, other researchers have indicated mixed support for the relationship of

the same factors (e.g., Cheng & Hampson, 2008).

2.6 Transfer outcomes

Sales executives regard their greatest research need as the determination of the

effectiveness of their sales training (Honeycutt, Ford, & Rao, 1995). More than 80% of

the skills acquired in training are not adapted on the job (Brinkerhoff, 2006; Broad &

Newstrom, 1992; Garavaglia, 1993). Organizations must clearly identify the factors that both encourage and those that deter the application of these newly learned skills in the workplace (Noe & Schmitt, 1986). A commonly used method of evaluating learning transfer is Kirkpatrick's (1976, 1996a, 1996b) four-level model (reaction, learning, behavior, results). Kirkpatrick's model measures whether or not the desired learning objectives have been accepted (level one), acquired (level two) and applied (level three of the model) leading to change (level four).

Kirkpatrick's model has gained both support (Alliger et. al, 1997) and criticism (Holton, 1996) in the literature (Cheng & Ho, 2001). Research has attempted to extend and improve Kirkpatrick's model citing varying limitations with the methodology. Scholars have suggested moving away from Kirkpatrick's approach to the use of more testable models (e.g., Holton, 1996). Kraiger et al. (1993) expanded Kirkpatrick's (1976) evaluation typology by using cognitive psychology to provide new conceptualizations of learning and evaluation theory. Other models have been developed to incorporate additional factors including trainee characteristics such as motivation, work environment, ability (Holton, 1996) as well as cognitive learning and knowledge structures (Day, Arthur, & Gettman, 2001). Nevertheless, Kirkpatrick's model remains the most commonly accepted method for training evaluation and continues as a fundamental part of more recent and comprehensive frameworks presented in the literature (Attia et al., 2005; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Van Buren & Erskine, 2002).

The current research will evaluate transfer by testing a model which incorporates both Kirkpatrick's theoretical framework and Holton's work environment factors along

with Tannenbaum et al.'s (1991) views on training evaluation. The combination of these models establishes a four stage transfer process described by Cheng et al. (2001) as: "(1) Pre-training motivation refers to the intended effort towards mastering the content of a training program. (2) Learning is the process of mastering the content of a training program. (3) Training performance is the measurement of the extent of what a trainee has achieved in a training context. (4) Transfer outcomes are those attainments made by the trainees when they apply what they have acquired in a training context back to the job, which can benefit both the trainees and the organization" (p. 2). The authors provided examples of transfer outcomes as behavior change, post-training attitudes, skill maintenance, and performance. Given this, the current study will examine role ambiguity and organizational commitment as transfer outcomes of increased personal learning.

2.6.1 role ambiguity.

The number of empirical studies on role perceptions in the sales literature is substantial (e.g., Churchill et al., 2000; Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981; Singh, 1998). Although multiple studies have been conducted exploring various factors, the field is consistently dominated by three interrelated constructs: role conflict, role overload, and role ambiguity (Singh et al.,1994; Singh 1998). The literature most commonly references role conflict and role ambiguity as role-stressors (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Jackson & Schuler, 1985) that can negatively impact both the firm and the person.

In their 1970, examination of role conflict and role ambiguity, Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman explained role conflict in terms of dimensions of compatibility or

incompatibility in performance expectations relative to a set of standards or conditions.

Thus, in field sales, role conflict can be seen as the disparity between the job

requirements and the expectations of the role members with whom the salesperson

interacts. Kahn et al. (1964) suggested five types of role conflict: a) role overload

(expecting individual to engage in multiple role behaviors at once or within a short time

frame); b) intra-sender role conflict (incompatibility with one role sender) c) inter-sender

role conflict (incompatibility between role senders); d) inter-role conflict

(incompatibility within the role pressures stemming from varying positions); and e)

person-role conflict (incompatibility associated with expectations of a person's position

in relation to their individual values). This provides a view of role conflict that is

premised as a structural issue based on a function of incompatibility (Van Sell et al.,

1981).

Despite the vast amount of literature investigating role conflict (Biddle, 1986;

Rizzo, et al., 1970; Van Sell et al., 1981), meta-analyses on role perceptions indicate role

ambiguity is a more consistent factor in explaining various job outcomes (Fisher &

Gitelson 1983; Jackson & Schuler 1985; Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981). Role

ambiguity occurs when salespeople do not believe they have the necessary information to

perform their jobs adequately (Churchill et al., 2000), or are they are uncertain about

what their superiors expect from them (Ford, Walker, & Churchill, 1975). Kahn et al.

(1964) argued the existence of two broad types of role ambiguity: task ambiguity and

socio-emotional ambiguity.

Task ambiguity occurs when there is insufficient information concerning the requirements of the job and the proper way to reach performance goals (Kahn et al., 1964). Socio-emotional ambiguity results from a person's concern about their individual standing based on the view of others and the perception of his/her actions toward the attainment of personal goals (Kahn et al., 1964). Rizzo et al. (1970) expanded Kahn et al.'s work by adding the component of information deficiency, or the lack of clarity of behavioral requirements which would provide knowledge and guide appropriate behavior (Pearce, 1981). This definition suggests role ambiguity is an absence of understanding and can be cleared up by eliminating knowledge deficits.

2.6.2 organizational commitment.

Many studies have focused on the antecedents and consequences of salesperson organizational commitment (e.g. Hunt, Wood, Chonko, 1989; Johnston, Parasuraman, Futrell, & Black, 1990; Schwepker, 2001) likely due to their boundary-spanning roles and lack of regular physical proximity to the organization for which they work. Organizational commitment refers to how strongly an employee identifies with and involves themselves in their organization (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Sales research considers organizational commitment a central construct in understanding salesperson behavior (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Singh et al., 1996). In fact, lower levels of organizational commitment may actually lead to dysfunctional outcomes (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). That is, the behaviors of employees who are psychologically detached from the organization may be dangerous for the firm.

Organizational commitment is characterized as employees' willingness to contribute to the goals of the organization, (Allen & Meyer, 1990) and is a key variable in explaining work-related behavior and its impact on performance (Benkhoff, 1997). Commitment is suggested as the driving force behind an organization's performance (Benkhoff, 1997). There are three factors which influence the organizational commitment process: personal influences (can be demographic such as age, education or general predispositions), non-organizational influences (external factors such as job embeddedness, other employment opportunities or financial incentives), and organizational influences (internal factors such as job duties, compensation, organizational policies) (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982).

Commitment has three components: affective, continuance, and normative. Affective commitment, whereby employees become emotionally and psychologically attached to their organizations and feel a sense of belongingness and is considered as a more effective measure of organizational commitment than continuance commitment and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The literature also suggests that employees that exhibit high levels of affective commitment to work, job and their career also demonstrate high levels of continuance and normative commitments (Cohen, 1996). In industries where employees develop high levels of self-interest that might expedite leaving one organization for another (Weiner, LaForge, & Goolsby, 1990), organizational commitment is especially important. This is particularly important in the sales environment where low commitment may contribute to further alienation felt by these workers (Sager & Johnston, 1989).

2.7 Intrinsic variable

Over the past decade, sales researchers have advanced multiple studies on the learning needs of salespeople (Attia, Honeycutt, & Leach, 2005; Chonko et al., 2002; Harris, Mowen, & Brown, 2005). Likewise, training researchers have examined a multitude of motivation related constructs in effort to understand what compels salespeople to acquire, transfer and retain knowledge. Of them, training motivation and motivation to transfer have garnered the most attention (Harris, et al., 2005).

Motivation to transfer refers to the individual's intended efforts to utilize skills and knowledge learned in training setting to a real world work situation (Noe, 1986; Noe & Schmidt, 1986; Yamkovenko, Holton, & Bates, 2007). Similarly, training motivation is defined as the intensity and persistence of efforts that trainees apply before, during, and after training toward activities designed for learning improvement (Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). Despite the increased attention the subject has received, research on motivation remains fragmented, however, the majority of studies have continued to examine motivation as an outcome variable influenced by either the motivation to learn (Kontoghiorghes, 2002), self-efficacy (Machin & Fogarty, 2004) or transfer climate factors (Seyler, Holton, Bates, Burnett, & Carvalho, 1998).

Motivation to learn has been identified as a key determinant of training effectiveness (e.g., Axtell, Maitlis, & Yearta, , 1997; Colquitt et al., 2000; Mathieu et al., 1992; Noe, 1986; Yi & Davis, 2003). Motivation to learn is the extent to which trainees intend to invest effort in a training program and fully embrace the training experience (Carlson et al., 2000). It differs from training motivation and motivation to transfer as it

represents a distinct form of motivation. Conceptually, scholars have found motivation to

learn is mutually exclusive from training motivation and motivation to transfer. These

three constructs are said to follow a temporal ordering; a salesperson with high levels of

training motivation is expected to be highly motivated to learn the content of the program

and consequently will more likely be motivated to transfer the learning into the

workplace (Holton, 2005).

2.8 Sales knowledge tools

      2.8.1 training and learning.

      Employees in boundary-spanning careers often have diminished ability and

opportunity to develop their skills and increase their relevant experience (Arthur,

Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Many times they are required

to work autonomously and must learn to maneuver through situations and circumstances

without direction from their supervisor or peers. Thus, the question becomes how to

approach the delivery of training information to salespeople in a manner to gain their

attention while emphasizing the importance of continuous efforts to apply the newly

learned skills?

      The Baldwin and Ford (1988) model of the transfer process held that the input

factors such as the trainee's ability, motivation and personality work in concert with

attributes of the training design and the support provided to the participants to directly

affect learning and retention. However, Blume et al. (2010) did not find consistent

support for any specific intervention strategy, and suggested there is no one element that

is effective for all training. Instead they caution those responsible for establishing

training initiatives to design the training activity with the specific audience and learning objectives in mind. Despite their findings, Blume et al. (2010) made a point to note that they did not believe the transfer of learning was unaffected by the training delivery method.

Effective sales training is a valuable factor contributing to organizational growth (Churchill et al., 2000). Training can make a difference in overall performance and most organizations recognize that training works (Honeycutt, et al., 2001). Yet, there is a lack of definitive empirical evidence that sales training efforts and activities lead to the desired or expected results (Attia et al., 2002; Errfmeyer, Russ, & Hair., 1991; Jantan et al., 2004). Lassk et al. (2012) suggest four reasons for this occurrence. First, the role of the salesperson is changing making it challenging to realize and actualize the needs of the salesperson (Attia & Honeycutt, 2012). Second, economic constraints make it difficult for companies to provide a compelling rationale to incur the cost of closing the knowledge gaps (Ricks, Williams & Weeks, 2008; Weeks & Stevens, 1997). This is notable since historically it has been difficult for companies to document the return on investment for training expenditures. Third, technology advances such as sales force automation and the Internet, have changed how people communicate and exchange information. Fourth, changing customer and employee demographics creates a need for organizations to make changes in their sales training content. The literature suggests sales training include topics such as cultural awareness to increase salespeople's cultural competencies (Salopek, 2009). The aforementioned topics are important in the sales field, but are seemingly overlooked by organizational literature

Some sales managers have suggested that one learns selling by doing not by training (Chang, 2003), and training neither results in knowledge that transfers to the job, nor does it improve the bottom line (Kraiger, McClinden, & Kasper, 2004; Salas et al., 1999). These managers consider training as "an unnecessary panacea that only deepens the impact of failure experienced by new salespeople and may even negatively influence experienced salespeople" (Wilson, Strutton & Farris, 2002, p. 77). This resistance to the training initiative indicates one of the primary barriers that prohibit the transfer of training (Churchill et al., 2000). Consistent with this point of view, many salespeople favor learning from customer interaction as opposed to classroom training and believe traditional training programs are not always the most effective use of their time (Powell, 2001). The apparent resentment of the training intrusion is considered another of several obstacles and barriers to the acceptance of sales training (Churchill et al., 2000). Similarly, some salespeople and sales managers believe their organizations fail to match their training initiatives with the competencies and expertise needed to succeed in their roles (Weeks & Stevens, 1997) leading to salespeople having apathetic feelings toward the training and creating yet another barrier to skill transference (Churchill et al., 2000).

Despite the ongoing debate among academics, it seems most believe that some degree of training is beneficial to salespeople, especially as they enter into new sales roles (Bragg, 1988; Briggs, Jaramillo, & Weeks, 2012, Rich, 1997). Researchers suggest that training may increase the salesperson's knowledge base and skill level (Attia & Dubinsky, 2012; Churchill et al., 1997; Walker et al., 1977). This is important in personal selling because skill level, referring to the individual capacity to implement

sales tasks (Leong, Busch, & John, 1989), is one of the antecedents of sales performance (Churchill et al., 1985; Plank & Reid, 1994; Verbeke et al., 2011). From this point of view, training enhances learning so that salespeople reach more acceptable performance levels in less time than learning through direct experience alone (Leigh, 1987).

Roman et al. (2002) holds that the choice of sales training delivery method influences the learning of sales skills. On-the-job training is suggested as one of the most effective methods of training salespeople (Roman et al., 2002). In spite of this, the most popular method of sales training remains the traditional instructor-led platform (Lambert, 2009). Employer-provided training can increase employee efficiency and help salespeople become more effective on the job (Lambert, 2009; Swanson, 1992). However, using designated internal trainers, especially in small businesses, may sometimes result in instances where the company trainer lacks expertise in the specifics of sales training and therefore would not meet the salespeople's theoretical training needs (Jackson & Hisrich, 1996; Roman et al., 2002).

Sales training contributes to improving salesperson knowledge and skill levels (Johnston & Marshall, 2005; Weitz, Sujan H. & Sujan, M., 1994), however, few studies have demonstrated how to empirically evaluate a sales training program (e.g., Attia, et al., 2012; Honeycutt et al., 2001). The inability to randomly assign salespeople to true experimental and control conditions for examination limits the ability to collect data (Laask et al., 2010), therefore there are practical limitations (Attia, Honeycutt, & Attia, 2002) restricting the implementation of many of the training evaluation models found in the literature (Attia & Honeycutt, 2012). Nonetheless, regardless of content, instructional

strategy or method of delivery, the goal of effective sales training is to enhance the

knowledge, skills and abilities of the salesperson (Lambert, 2009).   Thus, considering

the preceding, our study will examine the location of training delivery in determining the

most effective method of increasing personal learning or reproduction in the sales

environment and the following are hypothesized:

> H_1 *Training will have a positive effect on personal learning.*
> H_1a *Internal training will have a positive effect on personal learning.*
> H_1b *External training will have a positive effect on personal learning.*
> H_1c *On-the-job training will have a positive effect on personal learning.*

2.8.2 mentoring and learning.

Salespeople often have limited interaction (Singh, 1998) with supervisors or

trainers and may benefit greatly from mentors. Those who experience learning through

mentoring programs can develop skills related to communication, active listening, client

processes, and persuasion (Singh, 1998). It is suggested that due to the nature of personal

selling, mentoring may supersede training for the socialization of salespeople (Pullins &

Fine, 2002). The functions provided by mentors, especially in a fast-paced environment

such as sales, could ultimately springboard the protégés success beyond the training

experience (Bates et al., 1996), as mentoring is associated with a variety of attitudinal and

behavioral benefits (e.g., Brashear et al., 2006; Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Hartmann

et al., 2013).

From an environmental perspective, a potential barrier to the transfer of learning

is whether or not the company's culture supports the application of the newly learned

behavior (Holton, 1996). Of the factors impacting sales force performance, El-Ansary

(1993) found that top performing sales forces put emphasis on having experienced company salespeople as a training source for new salespeople. These mentors create a more suitable transfer climate by providing protégés with vocational support and psychosocial support to include networking, guidance, counseling and role modeling (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). It seems reasonable that a transfer climate where mentor support is encouraged would help a salesperson to overcome the aforementioned barriers and promote more successful learning transfer as the transfer climate has been found to mediate job attitudes and work behavior (Holton, Bates, & Ruona, 2000, p. 335).

Mentors engage in multiple interactions with protégés that focus on the importance and relevance of the trained skills, the purpose and value of training, and how the training benefits the employee's overall development (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Clarke, 2002; Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Richman-Hirsch, 2001; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). These interactions minimize the barriers that restrict transfer of training/learning thus promoting the application of new workplace behaviors. These relationships typically cross other social connections including those resulting from positions, departments and gender (Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008). In essence, mentor relationships mitigate stereotypes helping protégés learn to value the involvement and experience of others.

Mentors provide a great resource to aid in the personal learning required of salespeople in today's rapidly changing organizational environment. The presence of a mentor and the execution of mentoring functions have been found as antecedents of personal learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2002) and mentor relationships are effective in

helping to facilitate the personal learning of protégés (Kram & Hall, 1989). Yet, the support provided by internal and external mentors can be uniquely different.

Internal mentors are conceptualized to provide greater organizational resources, protection, exposure, access to challenging assignments and role modeling than external mentors (Ragins, 1997; Hartmann et al., 2013). Considering that internal mentors have intimate knowledge of the protégés organization, they are in a position to offer guidance specifically tailored to the protégés work environment. El-Ansary (1993) illustrated how experienced salespeople who are good at their jobs may provide an example for other employees to follow (Brashear et al., 2006; Dubinsky, 1996; Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Taylor, 2009). Salespeople may more readily identify with a senior colleague's experience and longevity which may increase their own sense of security (Greenhaus & Singh, 2007) and comfort in seeking information and proactively exchanging ideas (Morrison, 1993). This idea backs the premise that mentors, especially those who are a part of the same organization, may provide a role model for protégés to emulate. Internal mentors offer protégés more opportunities to observe and model job attitudes and behaviors; the same access is not possible for external mentors.

The literature has long argued that the role modeling function performed by mentors enables protégés to learn (Scandura, 1992). In applying the Social Learning Theory (Bandura & McClelland, 1977) to mentoring, a salesperson's behavior, environment, and personal qualities have a reciprocal effect on each other. Such modeling results in enhanced skill development and greater role understanding (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Through observational learning, or learning by observing or

imitating the mentors' behavior in varying job scenarios, protégés are able to recognize how their job is associated with others, thereby promoting relational job learning.

External mentors, on the other hand, are conceptualized to offer greater access to resources outside of the organization and increased career mobility and vocational support than internal mentors (Ragins, 1997). External mentors are not a part of the protégés organization and may allow for greater transparency in the relationship as they are void of intra-organizational politics (Ragins, 1997). Social learning theory holds that inactive learning occurs as a result of direct interaction with the mentor and helps the salesperson to develop favorable patterns of behavior (Bandura & McClelland, 1977; Noe, 1988). Through these interactions, the protégé observes the communication and response of the mentor and mimics these attitudes and behaviors in similar work settings thereby personal skill development increases.

As such, the following are hypothesized:

> H_2 *Mentoring will have positive effect on personal learning.*
> H_2a *Of those with mentors, salespeople with internal mentors will exhibit higher levels of personal learning than salespeople with external mentors.*

Extant mentoring literature indicates protégés prefer informal mentoring relationships (Ragins et al., 2000), however mixed results have been reported regarding outcomes of formal versus informal mentoring (Scandura & Williams, 2002). The general sentiment among scholars is that formal mentoring is better than no mentoring but not as effective as informal mentoring (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Scandura & Williams, 2002;

Seibert, 1999; Viator, 2001). Research suggests informal mentoring relationships yield

higher levels of job satisfaction and offers greater support and long-term career benefits

compared to formal mentoring relationships (Chao, Walz & Gardner 1992; Cross &

Thomas, 2008; Fagenson-Eland, Marks & Amendola, 1997; Ragins & Cotton, 1999;

Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000). However, formal mentoring has been associated with

positive benefits such as low levels of role ambiguity, less role conflict, diminished

perceptions of environmental uncertainty, and less frequent turnover intentions than in

informal mentoring relationships (Allen, Elby, & Lentz; 2006; Viator, 2001).

Protégés in informal mentoring relationships perceive greater psychosocial

benefits from the partnerships than career-related benefits (Noe, 1988). Several factors

could explain this. First, informal mentoring relationships develop as a result of a mutual

attraction, where formal mentoring relationships are created and managed by the

organization, structured in a way which matches mentors and protégés based on

compatibility (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). These partnerships are arranged for the

purpose of attaining career-related benefits based on company sanctioned criteria

(Fogarty & Dirsmith, 2001). As a result, in formal mentoring scenarios, a protégé may

attribute positive outcomes to the goals of the program and become motivated to invest

the effort into learning how their position fits in the overall success of the company

thereby increasing the protégés relational job learning.

Formal mentors are also usually required to submit to a prescribed time

commitment and the outcomes of these partnerships are often monitored and measured.

As a consequence, there is less time available for career-related support. It could be

asserted that ongoing sessions with the protégé would emphasize the value of transferring

the learned skill (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Richman-Hirsch,

2001; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). Also, formal mentoring relationships are usually

shorter-term therefore less time is available for employees to realize career-related

benefits (Kram, 1995). Continuing to build on the mentoring/learning hypothesis:

> H_2b *Of those with mentors, salespeople with informal mentors will exhibit higher levels of personal learning than salespeople with formal mentors.*

2.8.3 Coaching and learning

Coaching is an important resource for personal learning in the sales field, and is

becoming the management model of choice for sales managers (Mathews, 2004).

Managers and supervisors are better equipped to coach employees toward reaching their

goals because they are often involved in establishing the expectations. The supervisor

has continual day-to-day interaction with the salesperson to assist in obtaining the desired

behavioral changes. The supervisor is also in the best position to know whether their

direct reports are capable of performing to the expected standards (Michalak,1981) and

can suggest ways for the employees to avoid repeating errors (Ducharme, 2004). Axtell,

Maitlis, and Yearta (1997) found a correlation between supervision and the degree of

autonomy the employee was allowed in trying new skills or ways of accomplishing tasks

in successful transfer. The extent to which supervisors reinforce and encourage the

transfer of learning is considered a key variable in determining successful application of

the behavior (Quiñones et al., 1995; Richman-Hirsch, 2001; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Smith-Jentsch, Salas, & Brannick, 2001).

The American Society for Training and Development (2011) identifies coaching as one of nine areas of expertise deemed critical for workplace learning and performance. The publication describes sales coaching as the practice of reinforcing desired behavior. The relationship between salespeople and their managers represents untapped potential for this type of social learning (Kram & Cherniss, 2001) whereby ongoing development may occur. The American Society for Training and Development (2011) suggests by having a mere conversation to provide feedback, establish expectations and reinforce positive behavior, supervisors may encourage improved performance. From that perspective, the current research builds on the idea that supervisors help to create the environment that allows for increased levels of learning transfer, and the following is hypothesized:

H_3 Coaching will have a positive effect on personal learning.

2.9 Transfer outcomes

2.9.1 learning and role ambiguity.

Inherently, salespeople are highly vulnerable to role ambiguity by virtue of their daily activities. There is theoretical (Kahn et al., 1964) and empirical (Schuler, 1977) evidence suggesting the more skills an individual has, the better suited they are to tolerate role ambiguity. Role ambiguity occurs when salespeople feel unclear as to how to perform or when they are uncertain about the performance expectations of role partners

(Singh, 1993). This feeling is more common in sales due to the many demands and expectations of the many role partners including those inside of the organization such as management and peers as well as those outside of the organization such as customers and vendors (Kahn et al., 1964; Singh, 1993).

May and Kahnweiler (2000) stressed that some depth in initial learning is necessary for individuals to have the capacity to retrieve needed concepts or skills. This point of view suggests the actions are not determined by conscious effort but by mental processes that are derived as a result of repetition in varying conditions of practice (May & Kahnweiler, 2000). The more knowledge a salesperson acquires, the greater his or her ability to contribute to the organization. Learning builds self-esteem and encourages competence (Bandura, 1977). Presumably, salespeople who experience learning and acquire knowledge would display more positive work related behavior because they have greater confidence in their skill and ability. Learning may shape a salesperson's view of the work and organizational environment as a result of changes in the employee's perceptions, behavior, values, and attitudes (Lankau & Scandura, 2002).

Salespeople acquire information about tasks and roles, especially during the socialization process (Siegel et al., 1991), from various agents within an organization (Kram, 1985). Consistent with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura et al., 1977), salespeople experience less role ambiguity when they are closely supervised (Singh, 1994) because the interaction and contact allows them to become more aware of the expectations and demands of their superiors (Singh, 1994). Peers, supervisors and co-workers all help provide knowledge about the organization (e.g., Fogarty, 1992, 2000;

Kleinman et al., 2001; Siegel, 2000; Siegel et al., 1991, 1998) whereby the employee

gains an understanding of the vocational skills and social knowledge required for holding

an organizational role and being a part of the organization (Fogarty, 2000). This

knowledge allows salespeople to get a sense of how others within the organization

perceive their actions and how those actions affect others (Kram & Hall, 1995).

Moreover, salespeople who have input and influence in determining the standards used to

evaluate their performance also tend to exhibit lower levels of role ambiguity (Walker,

Churchill, & Ford, 1975; Jaramillo, Mukli, & Boles, 2011).

Lankau and Scandura (2002) found relational job learning fully mediated the

relationship between the vocational support function of mentoring and role ambiguity.

However, contrary to several of their other hypothesized linkages, it was discovered that

nonprotégés experienced the same level of skill development as protégés, and surmised

nonprotégés may acquire skills through various means including peer interaction, team

participation, and formal training programs. The literature suggests future researchers

should investigate other organizational contexts and characteristics which can influence

social interaction patterns and demands for learning. As such, this study proposes:

 H_4 Personal learning is negatively related to role ambiguity.

 2.9.2 learning and work commitment.

 In the context of personal selling, the positive relationship between organizational

commitment and performance has been found as stronger for salespeople than for

employees in non-sales positions (Jaramillo et al., 2005). Organizational commitment is

more important in complex careers that require adaptability, and demand initiatives, all of

which are characteristics of personal selling (Sager & Johnston, 1989). Several studies have found that employees have more affective commitment to their organizations when they believe their organizations are committed to them (Boles et al., 2007; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Shore,Tetrick, Lynch & Barksdale, 2006 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993). An organization's investment into knowledge tools such as training, mentoring and coaching may work to build this commitment as individual learning in the sales environment has been shown to translate into organizational outcomes. Employees exposed to more opportunities to learn are likely to display higher levels of affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). When employees have the necessary resources they become more engaged during work activities, are more committed to their jobs, and perform better (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010). In that respect, as a salesperson's ability to transfer learning to the workplace increases, so does the salesperson's organizational commitment, sales effectiveness, and customer relations (Leach & Liu, 2003). Thus, increasing sales skills will build organizational commitment (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Taylor, 2009).

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H_{5a} *Personal learning will be positively related to affective organizational commitment.*

H_{5b} *Personal learning will be positively related to continuance organizational commitment.*

H_{5c} *Personal learning will be positively related to normative organizational commitment.*

2.10 Motivation

A sales organization may benefit from having knowledgeable employees who are motivated to act in a manner consistent with the organizational objectives of which they have been informed (Shadur, Kienzle, & Rodwell, 1999). Job and personal resources such as opportunities to learn are related to the motivational processes. Anderson and Huang (2006) noted that being able to make on-the-spot decisions enable salespeople toenhance their relationships with customers. As a result, the salespeople feel more psychologically empowered and motivated. Resources (such as access to knowledge tools) effect intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which in turn supports employee achievement of work-related goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Reseachers have investigated both extrinsic and intrinsic factors as influences on transfer (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993; Santos & Stuart, 2003; Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Chan, 2005; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanagh, 1995) with the findings suggesting intrinsic factors have a strong impact on transfer outcomes. Motivation to learn has been found to influence the extent to which employees are willing to transfer newly acquired knowledge, skills and abilities on the job (e.g., Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Cheng & Ho, 1998, 2001). Salespeople would not likely be motivated to learn unless they perceive that doing so would lead to either improved performance or career development (Clark et al., 1993). Considering the ultimate goal of a learning initiative is for learning to occur, without motivation to learn, the employee would likely fail to acquire the content, negatively affecting the trainee's learning level (Baldwin et al., 1991; Quinones, 1995).

Consequently, motivation to learn can affect both transfer and learning (Grossman & Salas, 2011; LePine, J., LePine, M., & Jackson, 2004).

      Chiaburu and Marinova (2005) found a direct linkage between motivation to learn and training transfer. In direct contrast, other researchers could not find support for a direct relationship between motivation and transfer (Burke & Hutchins, 2007). Scholars have yet to determine a mechanism that would better explain the causal relationships between these variables, and we are not aware of a study that has assessed motivation to learn as influencing relationship between the knowledge tools in this study (training, mentoring and coaching) and personal learning. It is our prediction that motivation to transfer acts as a moderator, specifically:

H_6a *Motivation to learn moderates the relationship between training and personal learning.*

H_6b *Motivation to learn moderates the relationship between mentoring and personal learning.*

H_6c *Motivation to learn moderates the relationship between coaching and personal learning.*

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Overview

Chapter 3 provides a description of the research methods used to test the hypothesized relationships. First, we discuss the research design including a description of the sample of participants followed by a discussion of the data collection process. After-which, we discuss details of the analytical methods. This is followed by a description of the instruments used to measure each of the variables.

3.1.1 design.

A cross-sectional survey design was used to evaluate these relationships. Cross-sectional self-report methodology is common within organizational research. This methodology is appropriate in gathering information about job perceptions and gives the researcher insight into inter-correlations between these perceptions (Spector, 1994).

3.1.2 sample and data collection.

The data for this research was collected from a panel of frontline, field salespeople. The use of an online panel is consistent with previous Sales and Sales Management research (Burke, 2002; Haws, et al., 2012; Jaramillo, et al. 2009). There are several advantages to the use of panels in survey research, such as increased efficiency,

large samples, and access to a specialized group of respondents. Although there are some

drawbacks to panels regarding population representation due to selection bias and

Internet access (Darrat, Amyx, & Bennett 2010; Lohse, Bellman, & Johnson 2000), panel

data is frequently used in sales research. As noted by Darrat, Amyx and Bennett, "recent

high-quality business journals have become replete with online panel data" (2010, p.

243).

Following approval of the study by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at

Kennesaw State University, the survey was launched online by the panel company. The

survey included an introduction page and qualifying questions to ensure the participants

were in sales and specifically focused on B2B sales.   On the first page of the web survey,

people were supplied information about the purpose of the study and instructed to give

their consent for participation. Survey data were received via the Internet without any

personal identifiers of the respondents, and once received, the survey data were stored

anonymously.

In regard to the respondents, the sample consisted of salespeople from a variety of

employers to ensure the results were not organizationally driven and that the sample had

adequate variability to facilitate an examination of the relationships between the

constructs. Due to the exploratory nature of this research and keeping in mind the need

to compare the various groups of salespeople (e.g., formally mentored/informally and

mentored/nonmentored; internally trained/externally trained), it was determined that a

panel would be best for this study. This approach is consistent with prior sales research

(Boles, Babin & Brashear, 2011) and sales mentoring research (Pullins & Fine, 2002). To

determine the sample size needed, guidelines from Hair et al. (2010) and Cohen (1988) were used. Hair et al. (2010) offer a rule of thumb range when making sample size considerations during the research design process. The authors caution that a sample that is too small can cause the statistical test to be insensitive to the effects that are present in the data. On the other hand, a sample that is extremely large may cause over-sensitivity to the effects present in the data. The suggested ratio of observations to variables is no less than 5:1 and no more than 20:1. Cohen (1988) suggests that studies be designed to achieve alpha levels of at least .05 with power levels of at least 80 percent. Following these guidelines, a power analysis was conducted to better define the sample size required for this study; specifying an alpha of .05, a medium effect size of .15 (Cohen, 1988), and a desired statistical power level of .90.

Consistent with the recommendations of Cohen (1988) and Hair et al., (2010), we proposed a target sample of 150 across a range of industries. Ultimately, 878 people entered and consented to participate in the survey, 212 finished the first part of the survey which confirmed they were working in sales. There were 177 total respondents who finished the entire survey and were used for data analysis for a response rate of 20.02%. The sample was split almost evenly between male (49.2%) and female (50.8%) respondents which is reflective of the industries represented. Mean years in a sales position is 13.1 and mean age is 39 which is comparable to the representation reported by other sales researchers (Briggs et al., 2011; Chakrabarty et al., 2010; Marshall et al., 2012). Table 1 shows the sample composition by demographic characteristics.

Table 1 Sample Composition by Demographic Characteristics

Demographic	Category	Frequency	%
Gender			
	Male	87	49.2
	Female	90	50.8
Age			
	Under 21	4	2
	21-30	50	28
	31-40	44	24.9
	41-50	36	20.3
	51-60	35	19.8
	Over 60	8	4.5
Highest Level of Education			
	Some High School	1	.6
	High School Graduate	43	24.3
	Undergraduate Degree	104	58.8
	Master's Degree	25	14.1
	Doctoral Degree	4	2.3
Years of employment in sales			
	Less than 1 year	4	2.3
	1 to 3 years	30	17
	More than 3 years to 5 years	28	16
	More than 5 years to 10 years	37	21
	More than 10 years to 15 years	18	10.2
	More than 15 years to 20 years	14	7.9
	More than 20 years to 25 years	19	10.7
	More than 25 years to 30 years	12	6.8
	More than 30 years	15	8.5
Years in current role			
	Less than 1 year	21	11.9
	1 to 3 years	65	37
	More than 3 years to 5 years	29	16
	More than 5 years to 10 years	28	16
	More than 10 years to 15 years	11	6.2
	More than 15 years to 20 years	13	7.3
	More than 20 years to 25 years	3	1.7
	More than 25 years to 30 years	3	1.7
	More than 30 years	3	1.7
Years with current employer			
	Less than 1 year	15	8.5
	1 to 3 years	56	31.6
	More than 3 years to 5 years	39	22.0
	More than 5 years to 10 years	37	20.9
	More than 10 years to 15 years	14	7.9
	More than 15 years to 20 years	8	4.5
	More than 20 years to 25 years	2	1.1
	More than 25 years to 30 years	3	1.7
	More than 30 years	3	1.7
Industry			
	Manufacturing	19	10.7
	Distribution	67	37.9
	Services	76	42.9
	Other	18	8.5

3.2 Analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test whether the constructs in the hypothesized model actually fit our understanding of the factors. For evaluating the fit of the proposed models, this study employed various goodness-of-fit indices as Bollen (1989) recommended.   Goodness-of-fit estimates reflect the difference between the sample covariance used to obtain the parameter estimates and a predicted covariance matrix based on the parameter estimates (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Multiple indices of differing types were used to establish acceptable fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), the Normed Fit Index (NFI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) were calculated to estimate the fit for the current model. Hair et al. (2010) suggests, based on our sample of 177 respondents, and a model with more than 12 total indicator variables, evidence of adequate fit would include significant p-values, a GFI of .90 or better, a NFI of .95 or better, a CFI of .95 or better, and a RMSEA of .08 or lower.

After having determined that the model represented adequate construct reliability, it was evaluated to ensure significant and meaningful relationships between the variables as suggested by Nunnally (1978). Convergent validity, defined as the extent to which individual items in a construct share variance between them, was measured by the average variance extracted (AVE) from each construct with a value exceeding 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) as the guideline. Further, on recommendations presented by Campbell (1960), a test for discriminant validity and nomological validity was also conducted. Nomological validity was tested using a matrix of construct correlations to

examine whether the correlations among the constructs made sense in regard to the measurement theory (Hair et al., 2010). To test for discriminant validity, we compared the variance extracted estimates for each factor with the squared interconstruct correlations (SIC) associated with that factor understanding that AVE estimates should be larger than the corresponding squared interconstruct correlation estimates

Next, we assessed if the common data collection method was an issue. Although the ability to effectively generate and administer surveys is a positive attribute associated with using online surveys, common method variance (CMV) is sometimes an issue with this type of self-report data. Common method variance is "variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measures represent" (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003, p. 879). CMV creates false internal consistency, or rather a correlation among variables as a result of their common source.

The current research avoided measurement context issues and controlled for CMV by gathering survey data using both Likert-type scales and single-item response measures. Podsakoff, et al. (2003) recommends researchers vary the number of survey scale points to reduce the probability of common methods bias. Although having a consistent number of scale points makes the instrument more attractive to respondents, this method can also increase the chance of measurement errors. Thus, to minimize this type of CMV, the survey instrument contained items rated on 7-point and 11-point Likert-type scales. Further, the partial correlation procedure was performed to examine whether common method bias exists in the data (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Were

CMV an issue, one factor would account for a large proportion of the variance

(Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

Multiple regression was used to test the hypothesized linkages. For the current

study, multiple regression is preferred over second generation data analysis techniques

(Bagozzi & Fornell, 1982) such as structural equation modeling (SEM) because of the

use of single item dichotomous measures for multiple constructs (e.g., training,

mentoring, and coaching). The use of regression over second generation data analysis

techniques to examine the impact of mentoring is established within the current sales

literature (e.g., Hartmann et al., 2013; Pullins, Fine, & Warren, 1996). Further, the use of

regression allowed for the comparison of the independent variables in order to determine

the maximum predictive power of each variate. With regard to the effects of the

moderating variable, motivation, the process described by Baron and Kenny (1986) was

followed.

3.3 Instruments

    3.3.1 sales knowledge tools (table 2).

A nonmetric categorical scale was developed and used to capture respondent

mentor status (e.g., formal/informal, internal/external, mentored/nonmentored), training

status (e.g., internal/external), on-the-job training and coaching status (yes/no). The use

of dichotomous variables is consistent with existing sales training and mentoring research

(Moberg, 2008; Sager, Yi, & Futrell, 1998). The questions were designed to elicit

responses regarding specific training, mentoring, and/or coaching interactions. This was

done by asking the participant to recall and describe the 'majority' event or 'most

frequent' interaction. The responses were dummy coded whereby the dummy variables

were assigned a value of '1' to enable us to examine the relationships (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2: Description of Sales Knowledge Tools

1. Approximately how many times in a given year are you required to attend some form of sales training?_____

2. For the training identified in Question #1 would you describe the training as Internal (majority provided by organizational trainers) or External (majority provided by trainers outside of the organization) or on-the-job training (majority training derived by completing job tasks)?

    _Internal Training   _External Training   _On-the-job Training   _Other

3. Do you have a sales coach? (a coach is responsible for helping an employee learn the tasks and skills needed to perform successfully in the job. A coach would work for the same organization and could be a manager, supervisor or other individual whose function is to work hands-on with you toward achieving sales goals).
    __Yes   __No

4. Have you been mentored at any time in your career? (A mentor is a more experienced person who helps a less experienced person learn to navigate their work environment.)

    __Past but not currently   __Currently   __Never mentored

5. If you have been mentored, would you consider the mentor with whom you have/had the most significant interaction as an Internal mentor (employed by the same organization) or External mentor (employed outside of the organization)? Formal (assigned by the organization) or Informal (spontaneously developed relationship)?

    __Internal Mentor   __Informal Mentor   __External Mentor   __Formal Mentor

3.3.2 personal learning (table 3).

Learning was measured using a 12-item scale developed by Lankau and Scandura (2002). The personal learning scale has been widely used to measure personal learning experienced in mentoring and team relationships (e.g., Hirschfeld, Thomas, & Lankau, 2006; Kwan & Mao, 2011; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Liu & Fu, 2011; Liu & Liu & Loi, 2010). The instrument represents two dimensions: relational job learning and personal skill development. On an 11-point Likert scale, respondents were instructed to: "Answer the following questions with regard to your learning experiences." Responses were anchored from 1 *strongly disagree* to 11 *strongly agree.*

Table 3: Personal Learning

Construct	Items	Source
Personal Learning		Lankau, M. J. & T. A. Scandura (2002)
	1. I have gained insight into how another department functions.	
	2. I have increased my knowledge about the organization as a whole.	
	3. I have learned about others' perceptions about me or my job.	
	4. I have increased my understanding of issues and problems outside my job.	
	5. I better understand how my job or department affects others.	
	6. I have a better sense of organizational politics.	
	7. I have learned how to communicate effectively with others.	
	8. I have improved my listening skills.	
	9. I have developed new ideas about how to perform my job.	
	10. I have become more sensitive to others' feelings and attitudes.	
	11. I have gained new skills.	
	12. I have expanded the way I think about things.	

3.3.3 role ambiguity (table 4).

Role ambiguity was measured using a 6-item scale developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970).   Items in the scale represent role ambiguity and are stated in terms of the absence of ambiguity (Kelloway & Barling, 1990), where on a 7-point Likert scale, 1 indicates greatest ambiguity and 7 indicates least ambiguity. Thus, items which represent role ambiguity require reverse coding procedures such that a response of 7 becomes 1, 6 becomes 2, etc. (House, Schuler & Levanoni, 1983; Rizzo et al., 1970). Respondents were asked: "Please answer the following questions with regard to your role within your firm with 1 being Very False and 7 being Very True."

Table 4: Role Ambiguity

Construct	Items	Source
Role Ambiguity		Rizzo, J., House, R. & Lirtzman,S. (1970)
	1. Clear, planned goals and objectives exist for my job.	
	2. I know that I have divided my time properly.	
	3. I know what my responsibilities are.	
	4. I know exactly what is expected of me.	
	5. I feel certain about how much authority I have.	
	6. Explanation is clear of what has to be done.	

3.3.4 organizational commitment (table 5).

Organizational commitment was measured using an 18-item scale developed by Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993). The scale contained six items each for the 3 facets of commitment identified by Meyer and Allen (1991): affective, continuance and normative. On an 11-point Likert scales, responses were anchored with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 11 indicating strongly agree. Respondents were instructed to answer the questions with regard to their organization.

Table 5: Organizational Commitment

Construct	Items	Source
Organizational Commitment	**Affective Organizational Commitment** 1.I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization. 2.I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own. 3.I do not feel a strong sense of 'belonging' to my organization. (R) 4.I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization. (R) 5.I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization. (R) 6.This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me. **Continuance Organizational Commitment** 1.Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire. 2.It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to. 3.Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization. 4. I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization. 5. If I had not already put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working elsewhere. 6. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives. **Normative Organizational Commitment** 1.I do not feel any obligation to remain with my current employer. 2.Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now. 3.I would feel guilty if I left my organization now. 4.This organization deserves my loyalty. 5.I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it. 6.I owe a great deal to my organization.	(Meyer, Allen, and Smith, 1993)

3.3.5 motivation to learn (table 6).

Motivation to learn was assessed using Noe and Schmitt's (1986) 8-item scale. Participants answered questions with regard to how they view learning in the workplace and rated their agreement with each item using a 7-point Likert scale. Responses were anchored from 1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree.*

Table 6: Motivation to Learn

Construct	Items	Source
Motivation to Learn		Noe, R.A. & Schmitt, N. (1986)
	1. I will try to learn as much as I can from this course.	
	2. I am motivated to learn the skills emphasized in the training program.	
	3. Learning the content covered in this training course is important to me.	
	4. If I cannot understand something during this training course, I am likely to get frustrated and stop trying to learn.	
	5. I would like to improve my skills.	
	6. I will exert considerable effort in this training course in order to learn the material.	
	7. I believe I can improve my skills by participating in this training course.	
	8. I think I could perform the tasks covered in this course quite well without any training.	

3.4 Summary

This chapter reviewed the methods of the study, including research design, Instrumentation, population and sample, data collection, and data analysis. A nonmetric categorical scale was developed to assess training, mentoring and coaching status. For the remaining constructs including motivation, personal learning, role ambiguity and organizational commitment, existing measures were used. A web-based survey was presented to 878 participants randomly selected by the survey panel company. In all, 177 respondents completed the survey for a 20.02% response rate.

CHAPTER 4

Results

This chapter presents results of the analysis of data in this study. Confirmatory

factor analysis was performed and additional assessments were used to confirm the

validity and reliability of the constructs. To confirm the hypotheses, regression analysis

was used which provided indications of the strength of the proposed relationships

between the constructs. The interrelationships and correlations of the key constructs as

well as findings from the testing of the hypotheses are then reported.

4.1 Evaluating the Measurement Model

A total of 177 respondents were used to test the model which contained 7 multi-

item constructs with a total of 44 items. The items in the study were entered into a CFA

in Amos to determine the reliability and validity of the constructs and to evaluate the fit

between observed and estimated covariance matrices (Hair et al., 2011). The

measurement model was initially presented for 7 latent variables. Results from the Amos

outputs suggested measurement modifications were needed. Using the modification

indices from the Amos outputs, items were identified with high cross loadings. If

modification indices and reliabilities both suggested that an item should be removed from

the model, the item was then deleted from the model unless the item deletion would have

resulted in moving the coefficient alpha below the threshold of .70, as recommended by

Hair et al. (2011). After removing each item, assessing numerous Amos outputs and

construct reliabilities, as well as performing validity checks, the measurement model was run again to assess the actual impact of removing an item.

During this process, 5 items were removed from motivation, 3 items from continuance organizational commitment, 3 items affective organizational commitment, 3 items from normative organizational commitment, and 3 items from role ambiguity. Further, it was determined that personal skill development and relational job learning did not have discriminant validity. As such, the 5 strongest indicator items from personal skill development and relational job learning were observed and reported as one construct measuring personal learning (Liu and Fu, 2011) as opposed to two separate constructs. Ultimately, the final model included a total of 20 items used to measure the six constructs. According to Hu and Bentler (1999) and Hair et al. (2010), results for the final measurement model suggested acceptable model fit (DOF= 155; Chi-Square=245.67; GFI=.878; NFI=.884; CFI=.950; and RMSEA=.058). Table 7 provides a summary of the factor loadings and fit indices.

Table 7 Factor Loadings and Fit Indices

Construct	Factor Loadings				
Motivation	0.821	.897	.733		
Personal Learning	0.740	.751	.633	.720	.775
Affective Org Commitment	0.815	.661	.779		
Continuance Org Commitment	0.954	0.793	0.535		
Normative Org Commitment	0.787	0.910	0.920		
Role Ambiguity	0.892	0.903	0.738		

Model	*Df*	χ^2	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	GFI
Initial 44-item Model	881	2425.59**	.100	.754	.664	.570
Final 20-item Model	155	245.67**	.058	.950	.884	.878

CFI = Comparative Fit Index, RMSEA = Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation, NFI = Normed Fit Index, CFI = Comparative Fit Index, GFI = Goodness of Fit Index (GFI); **$p<.01$

4.1.2 internal consistency reliability.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency reliability of the constructs. Coefficient alpha values between 0.70 and 0.90 are considered as satisfactory (Fair, 2009). The threshold for internal reliability (> 0.7) was met for the final measurement model (Field, 2009).

4.1.3 discriminant validity.

The Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion was used to assess discriminant validity. To demonstrate discriminant validity, all average variance extracted estimates should be larger than the corresponding squared inter-construct correlation estimates. By this criterion, indicators with a square root of the AVE that is higher than its highest correlation with any other construct is considered to have discriminant validity. All constructs met the guidelines for discriminant validity.

4.1.4 convergent validity.

Convergent validity was evaluated by examination of the AVE to determine if items should be removed. Hair et al., (2011) recommends that the AVE fall within the guideline of at least 0.50 to demonstrate convergent validity. The analysis of convergent validity of the final model revealed all standardized loading estimates met the guideline of between 0.5 and 0.7 or higher with AVE of 0.5 or greater which suggests adequate convergent validity. Table 8 displays scale statistics of the constructs used in the study.

TABLE 8 Scale statistics: Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and AVE

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Motivation	(.85)					
2 Personal Learning	0.59[**]	(.85)				
3 Role Ambiguity	-0.33[**]	-0.51[**]	(.85)			
4 Affective Org Commitment	0.25[**]	0.36[**]	-0.21[**]	(.79)		
5 Normative Org Commitment	0.22[**]	0.28[**]	-0.14	0.69[**]	(.80)	
6 Continuance Org Commitment	0.09	0.19[**]	-0.09	0.38[**]	0.41[**]	(.88)
Means	6.00	8.54	2.35	7.15	7.00	7.09
SD	1.00	1.65	1.17	2.66	2.69	2.62
AVE	.672	.534	.634	.539	.765	.608

Alpha values are shown in bold
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

4.2 Predicting Personal Learning

Hypothesis 1, 2 and 3 predict a positive relationship will exist between personal learning and training, mentoring, and coaching respectively. Specifically, it was hypothesized in H1a that internal training would have positive effect on personal learning. Hypothesis 1b proposed a positive significant relationship between external training and personal learning, and H1c posits there would be a positive significant relationship between on-the-job training (OJT) and personal learning. Results for H1 indicate the hypothesis is partially supported as a positive relationship was found between external training and personal learning as hypothesized in H1b, (β=.400; p<.05). However, the relationship between internal training and personal learning as proposed by H1a was not supported (p>.05). Similarly, OJT was proposed in H1c to have a significant relationship with personal learning. However, the relationship did not exist and the hypothesis was not supported (p>.05).

Hypothesis 2 predicted mentoring would have a positive effect on personal learning. Results for H2 indicate the hypothesis is partially supported as a positive relationship was found between internal mentoring and personal learning. Results for H2a showed salespeople with internal mentors exhibited higher levels of personal learning than salespeople with external mentors, as there was no significance between external mentoring and personal learning (p>.05). Results provide support for H2a (β=.200, p<.05).

Hypothesis 2b went further to propose that informal mentoring would have a stronger relationship to personal learning than formal mentoring. The analysis revealed a

mean of 8.78 for informal mentoring, and a mean of 8.69 for formal mentoring.   The

results fail to provide support for H2b as it was determined there is not a statistical

difference between informal mentoring and formal mentoring. Thus, the study will give

no further consideration to differences with informal mentoring and formal mentoring,

and we will not report additional results these constructs.

Hypothesis 3 predicted a positive relationship will exist between coaching and

personal learning. Results for H3 reveal there is not a significant relationship between

the constructs (p>.05). Results fail to support H3. The overall model provided an R^2 of

0.075 when predicting personal learning. Table 9 shows the results of the regression

tests.

Table 9 Regression Results: Personal Learning Predicted by Training, Mentoring and Coaching

	β	t-value
Construct		
Internal Training	.350	1.387
External Training	.400	2.012*
OJT	.446	1.893
Coaching	.019	0.246
Internal Mentor	.200	2.311*
External Mentor	.042	0.484
R^2	.075	
Adjusted R^2	.037	

**Significant at p<0.01; *Significant at p<0.05

4.3 Predicting Role Ambiguity

Hypothesis 4 proposed a negative relationship will exist between personal learning and role ambiguity. Results for H4 indicate a strong correlation between personal learning and role ambiguity (β= -.510, p<.01). The model provided an R^2 of .260. Results provide support for H4. The results of the regression tests are provided in Table 10.

Table 10 Regression Results: Role Ambiguity Predicted by Personal Learning

	β	t-value
	-.510	-7.847**
R^2	.260	
Adjusted R^2	.256	

**Significant at p<0.01; *Significant at p<0.05

4.4 Predicting Organizational Commitment

Hypotheses 5a -5c predicted that personal learning would have a significant relationship with affective organizational commitment, continuance organizational commitment, and normative organizational commitment, respectively. In analyzing the relationship between personal learning and the facets of organizational commitment, role ambiguity was investigated as a controlled relationship. The results indicated the introduction of role ambiguity as a control variable had no effect on the relationship between personal learning and affective commitment and normative commitment; however, the control relationship impacted the significance personal learning and continuance commitment.

Results suggest a significant relationship between personal learning and affective organizational commitment, (β=.301, p<.01) thus offering support for H5a. The model provided an R^2 of .134. Table 11 displays the results of the main effects as well as the control effects for the regression of personal learning and affective organizational commitment.

Table 11 Regression Results: Affective Organizational Commitment Predicted by Personal Learning

	Control		Personal Learning with Control	
	β	t-value	β	t-value
Role Ambiguity	-.214	-*2.893**	-.038	.458
Personal Learning			.345	4.257**
R^2	.046		.134	
Adjusted R^2	.040		.124	

**Significant at $p<0.01$; *Significant at $p<0.05$

Results indicated a significant relationship between personal learning and

continuance organizational commitment, (β=.194, $p<.05$) therefore H5b is supported.

The model provided an R^2 of .038. The results of the main and control effects of the

regression are provided in Table 12.

Table 12 Regression Results: Continuance Organizational Commitment Predicted by Personal Learning

	Control		Personal Learning with Control	
	β	t-value	β	t-value
Role Ambiguity	-. 099	-1.312	.000	.005
Personal Learning			.194	2.248*
R^2	.010		.038	
Adjusted R^2	.004		.027	

**Significant at $p<0.01$; *Significant at $p<.05$

Results indicated a significant relationship between personal learning and normative

organizational commitment, (β=.284, $p<.01$) thereby offering support for H5c. The model

provided an R^2 of .079. The results of the main effects and the control effects of the

regression of personal learning on normative organizational commitment are provided in

Table 13.

Table 13 Regression Results: Normative Organizational Commitment Predicted by Personal Learning

	Control		Personal Learning with Control	
	β	t-value	β	t-value
Role Ambiguity	-.140	-1.871	.005	.058
Personal Learning			.284	3.360**
R^2	.020		.079	
Adjusted R^2	.014		.069	

**Significant at $p<0.01$; *Significant at $p<.05$

4.5 Motivation as a Moderator

    4.5.1 training.

    To test Hypotheses 6 (a-c), moderated regression was executed using hierarchical multiple regression to test for the effect of motivation. The dependent variable for each test was personal learning. For Hypothesis 6a, the independent variables (each run separately) were internal training, external training, and OJT. Hypothesis 6b, included the independent variables internal mentor, external mentor. For Hypothesis 6c, the independent variable was coaching. When observed in the moderated regression models, neither internal training nor OJT had a significant relationship with personal (p>.05).

    Although external training was previously established by this study as being significantly related to personal learning, when analyzed with the interaction of motivation, the relationship was no longer significant. Motivation was statistically significant in all of the regression models suggesting motivation has a direct relationship with personal learning. Models 2 and 3 indicate the beta coefficients for the independent variables and interaction term were not statistically significant (p>.05). This provides support for the lack of moderation by motivation. The results, shown in Table 14 do not support H6a.

Table 14 Moderated Regression Results: Training

| | Main Effect | | Main Effect with Motivation | | Interaction | |
| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | |
	β	t-value	β	t-value	β	t-value
Internal Training	-.118	-1.570	-.111	-1.546	-.314	-.853
Motivation			.593	9.824**	.557	6.237**
Internal Training x Motivation					.208	.557
R^2	.014		.366		.367	
Adjusted R^2	.008		.358		.356	
External Training	.115	1.537	.095	1.564	.343	.668
Motivation			.591	9.758**	.600	9.479**
External Training x Motivation					-.250	-.487
R^2	.013		.362		.363	
Adjusted R^2	.008		.355		.352	
OJT	.077	1.024	.075	1.233	.580	1.587
Motivation			.594	9.787**	.651	8.937**
OJT x Motivation					-.515	-1.401
R^2	.006		.339		.366	
Adjusted R^2	.000		.352		.355	

**Significant at $p<0.01$; *Significant at $p<.05$

4.5.2 mentoring (internal).

It is hypothesized in 6b that relationship between mentoring and personal learning is moderated by motivation. Table 15 displays the coefficients from the moderated regression. Results indicated motivation had a direct relationship with personal learning and was statistically significant in all regression models. We learned earlier in the study that internal mentor is significantly related to personal learning (β=.200, p<.01). However, models 2 and 3 indicate the beta coefficients for the regression with motivation and the interaction term were not statistically significant (p>.05). This suggests a lack of moderation for motivation with regard to the internal mentoring/personal learning relationship. The results fail to provide support for H6b.

4.5.3 mentoring (external).

The moderated regression analysis shows external mentoring did not have a significant relationship with personal learning in either model (p>.05). In Models 2 and 3, when regressed with the motivation variable and the interaction term, the only a construct with a significant relationship with personal learning was motivation. This suggests that motivation does not moderate the external mentoring/personal learning relationship. Thus, Hypothesis 6b is not supported. Table 15 displays the coefficients from the moderated regression.

Table 15 Moderated Regression Results: Mentoring

	Main Effect Model 1		Main Effect with Motivation Model 2		Interaction Model 3	
	β	t-value	β	t-value	β	t-value
Internal Mentor	.175	2.346*	.126	2.091*	-.057	-.155
Motivation			.584	9.665**	.555	6.628**
Internal Mentor x Motivation					.190	.507
R^2	.030		.369		.370	
Adjusted R^2	.025		.362		.359	
External Mentor	-.020	-.268	-.010	.161	-.122	-.334
Motivation			.595	9.746**	.585	8.743**
External Mentor x Motivation					.134	.366
R^2	.000		.353		.354	
Adjusted R^2	-.005		.346		.343	

**Significant at $p<0.01$; *Significant at $p<.05$

4.5.4 coaching.

The moderated regression analysis shows coaching is not significantly related to personal learning in either model. In Models 2 and 3, when regressed the relationship to also include the motivation variable and the interaction term, the only significant relationship is that of motivation. Table 16 displays the coefficients from the moderated regression of the coaching variable. Motivation has a direct relationship with personal learning and is statistically significant in the regression model. Models 2 and 3 indicate the beta coefficients were not statistically significant. This shows moderation is not present, and Hypothesis 6c is not supported.

Table 16 Moderated Regression Results: Coaching

	Main Effect Model 1		Main Effect with Motivation Model 2		Interaction Model 3	
	β	t-value	β	t-value	β	t-value
Coaching	.068	.907	.102	1.688	.217	.631
Motivation			.600	9.909**	.612	7.680**
Coaching x Motivation					-.117	-.339
R^2	.005		.364		.364	
Adjusted R^2	-.001		.356		.353	

**Significant at $p<0.01$; *Significant at $p<0.05$

4.6 Personal Learning as a Mediator

    4.6.1 role ambiguity.

Our model implies mediation between the constructs although the mediated relationships are not specifically hypothesized. In modeling the effect of sales training, mentoring, and coaching on personal learning, we inferred that personal learning would mediate the relationship between the independent attention tools and the dependent variables role ambiguity and organizational commitment. To determine the mediated effects, we referenced the guidelines set forth by Baron and Kenny (1986).

The regression results discussed earlier in the study revealed that both external training and internal mentor were significantly related to personal learning. Having supported the initial step of mediation testing, external training and internal mentor were entered into a hierarchical regression with role ambiguity as the dependent variable.

In step two of the analysis, Model 2 indicates neither construct has a significant relationship with role ambiguity (p>.05). Thus, as per the Baron and Kenny (1986) guideline, it was determined that personal learning does not mediate the relationships between sales training, mentoring, and coaching in relation to role ambiguity. The coefficients of the mediated regression test for role ambiguity are displayed in Table 17.

Table 17 Mediated Regression Results: Role Ambiguity

Construct	Personal Learning Model 1		Role Ambiguity Model 2	
	β	t-value	β	t-value
Internal Training	.350	1.387	.126	.486
External Training	.400	2.012*	.177	.865
OJT	.446	1.893	.184	.759
Coaching	.019	0.246	.079	.999
Internal Mentor	.200	2.311*	-.088	-.991
External Mentor	.042	0.484	-.006	-.065
R^2	.075		.023	
Adjusted R^2	.042		-.011	

**Significant at $p<0.01$; *Significant at $p<0.05$

4.6.2 organizational commitment.

Having supported the initial step of mediation testing as previously stated,

external training and internal mentor were entered into hierarchical regression first with

affective commitment as the dependent variable. This was followed by testing

continuance commitment and normative commitment as dependent variables,

respectively.

4.6.2.1 affective organizational commitment.

In step 2 of the analysis, internal mentor was significantly related to affective

commitment (β=.171, p<.05), but external training was not (p>.05). Internal mentor was

therefore tested for a mediating effect with affective organizational commitment. To

satisfy the third step of mediation testing, the regression results of Model 3 were

analyzed. We learned internal mentor was no longer significantly related to affective

organizational commitment (p>.05). It was determined the Baron and Kenny (1986)

criteria was met which substantiated that personal learning fully mediated the relationship

between internal mentor and affective commitment. Table 18 shows the coefficients of

the mediated regression tests.

Table 18 Mediated Regression Results: Affective Organizational Commitment

Construct	Personal Learning Model 1		Affective Commitment Model 2		Model 3	
	β	t-value	β	t-value	β	t-value
Internal Training	.350	1.387	-.310	-1.290	-.435	-1.854
External Training	.400	2.012*	-.094	-.495	-.242	-1.291
OJT	.446	1.893	-.237	-1.058	-.400	1.800
Coaching	.019	0.246	-.254	3.472	.236	3.323*
Internal Mentor	.200	2.311*	.162	1.961*	.114	1.432
External Mentor	.042	0.484	.073	.863	.059	.746
Role Ambiguity	-	-	-.231	-3.253	-.071	-.862
Personal Learning	-	-	-	-	.340	3.574**
R^2	.075		.171		.229	
Adjusted R^2	.042		.136		.192	

**Significant at $p<0.01$ *Significant at $p<.05$.

4.6.2.2 continuance organizational commitment.

As stated before, the initial steps of mediation testing were satisfied earlier in the study, therefore, external training and internal mentor were entered into a hierarchical regression with continuance organizational commitment as the dependent variable. In Model 2, internal mentor was significantly related to continuance commitment (β=.089, p<.05) however, external training was not (p>.05). We then performed the third step of the mediation test. The analysis of Model 3 revealed internal mentor was no longer significantly related to continuance commitment (p>.05), thereby establishing that personal learning fully mediates the relationship between internal mentor and continuance commitment. The coefficients of the mediated regression tests are displayed in Table 19.

Table 19 Mediated Regression Results: Continuance Organizational Commitment

| Construct | Personal Learning | | Continuance Commitment | | | |
| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | |
	β	t-value	β	t-value	β	t-value
Internal Training	.350	1.387	-.449	-1.782	-.500	-1.097
External Training	.400	2.012*	-.206	-1.036	-.263	-1.299
OJT	.446	1.893	-.353	-1.502	-.417	-1.749
Coaching	.019	0.246	.109	1.425	.109	1.418
Internal Mentor	.200	2.311*	.178	2.059*	.145	1.664
External Mentor	.042	0.484	.128	1.465	.121	1.399
Role Ambiguity	-	-	-.108	-1.450	-.026	-.290
Personal Learning	-	-	-	-	.154	1.701
R^2	.075		.089		.104	
Adjusted R^2	.042		.051		.061	

**Significant at $p<0.01$; *Significant at $p<0.05$

4.6.2.3 normative organizational commitment.

The first step of mediation testing having been satisfied previously, external training and internal mentor were entered into hierarchical regression with normative organizational commitment as the dependent variable.   In step two of the analysis, Model 2 showed neither variable had a significant relationship with normative commitment. It was determined, as per the Baron and Kenny (1986) guideline that personal learning does not mediate the relationship between external training and normative commitment. Likewise, personal learning does not mediate the relationship between internal mentor and normative commitment. Table 20 displays the coefficients for the mediated regression test for normative commitment.

Table 20 Mediated Regression Results: Normative Organizational Commitment

	Personal Learning Model 1		Normative OC Model 2	
	β	t-value	β	t-value
Construct				
Internal Training	.350	1.387	-.400	-1.650
External Training	.400	2.012*	-.047	-.246
OJT	.446	1.893	-.219	-.964
Coaching	.019	0.246	.191*	2.584
Internal Mentor	.200	2.311*	.143	1.711
External Mentor	.042	0.484	.065	.776
Role Ambiguity	-	-	-.165*	-2.303
R^2	.075		.153	
Adjusted R^2	.042		.118	

**Significant at $p<0.01$; *Significant at $p<0.05$

4.7 Summary

Six hypotheses were tested and the results are summarized in Table 21. The results affirm external training and internal mentoring had an impact on personal learning. Coaching, however, did not have an effect on personal learning in this study. It was further discovered that both informal and formal mentoring were positively related to personal learning with little statistical distinction between them. Motivation did not perform as expected, and the moderation hypotheses were rejected. As predicted, personal learning had a negative, significant relationship with role ambiguity and a positive, significant relationship with affective organizational commitment, continuance organizational commitment and normative organizational commitment. Despite the implication that personal learning would mediate the relationship between all of the sales knowledge tools and the outcome variables, the only relationships found to be mediated by personal learning were internal mentoring, affective organizational commitment and continuance organizational commitment.

Table 21 Summary of Hypothesis Tests

H1	Training will have a positive effect on personal learning.	PARTIALLY SUPPORTED
H1a	Internal training will have a positive effect on personal learning.	NOT SUPPORTED
H1b	External training will have a positive effect on personal learning.	SUPPORTED
H1c	On-the-job training will have a positive effect on personal learning.	NOT SUPPORTED
H2	Mentoring will have positive effect on personal learning.	PARTIALLY SUPPORTED
H2a	Of those with mentors, salespeople with internal mentors will exhibit higher levels of personal learning than salespeople with external mentors.	SUPPORTED
H2b	Of those with mentors, salespeople with informal mentors will exhibit higher levels of personal learning than salespeople with formal mentors.	NOT SUPPORTED
H3	Coaching will have a positive effect on personal learning.	NOT SUPPORTED
H4	Personal learning is negatively related to role ambiguity.	SUPPORTED
H5a	Personal learning will be positively related to affective organizational commitment.	SUPPORTED
H5b	Personal learning will be positively related to continuance organizational commitment.	SUPPORTED
H5c	Personal learning will be positively related to normative organizational commitment.	SUPPORTED
H6a	Motivation moderates the relationship between training and personal learning.	NOT SUPPORTED
H6b	Motivation moderates the relationship between training and personal learning.	NOT SUPPORTED
H6c	Motivation moderates the relationship between training and personal learning.	NOT SUPPORTED

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

5.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the results of the dissertation, research ideas, and recommendations for scholars investigating these concepts in the future. First, there is a summary and general discussion of the findings. That is followed by managerial and theoretical implications of the research, limitations of the study, suggestions for future research and conclusions.

5.2 Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the effects that sales knowledge tools (mentoring and coaching) had beyond that of sales training as mechanisms for increasing learning, improving organizational commitment and decreasing role ambiguity. This study contributes to the understanding of the under-researched area of learning transfer in the sales environment. The sales knowledge tools (training, mentoring and coaching) were evaluated as independent variables influencing personal learning. The dependent variables, role ambiguity and organizational commitment, were investigating as being as predicted by personal learning.

Regression results provided a strong positive correlation between external training and personal learning, internal mentoring and personal learning and both formal and informal mentoring and personal learning. Although motivation was predicted to moderate the influence of these variables on personal learning, there was no support for the interaction. As expected, personal learning had a strong negative relationship with role ambiguity. Moreover, personal learning was significantly related to affective organizational commitment, continuance organizational commitment and normative organizational commitment as hypothesized. The findings of this to study are discussed in the sections below.

5.3 Training

Hypothesis 1 (H_1) predicted that training would positively affect personal learning. Although partial support was found in Hypothesis 1b (H_{1b}) with a positive relationship between external training and personal learning, the lack of support for the relationship between personal learning and both internal training (H_{1a}) and OJT (H_{1c}) suggests that the personal learning can be influenced by the sales knowledge tool and platform for delivery. The results of our analysis showed that contrary to what might be held as conventional wisdom, company-sponsored internal training programs are perhaps not always the best option for organizations looking to increase transfer of sales learning. Instead, the results suggest external providers may offer a more rewarding approach for B2B salespeople. However, caution should be taken, given that both internal training and on-the-job training were approaching significance. Further, the amount or quantity of

behaviors does not discriminate in successful versus unsuccessful training, it is possible the quality of those behaviors would impact the results.

Primary findings associated with past studies on the topic of sales training point to the need for salespeople to continually update their skills (Anderson et al., 2006; Dubinsky et al., 2001). Being trained only once or periodically is not enough for a salesperson to remain current and up to date with their skills (Iizuka, 2008). Thus, another potential explanation for the significant relationship between external training and personal learning is that often external training is offered as supplemental skill development. Many times participants volunteer for external training. A salesperson who takes additional external training modules may do so based on their interest to increase their skills and make positive changes on the job. Burke and Baldwin (1999), found individuals who volunteer for training have a vested interest in the outcome. Ultimately, the process of behavior change starts with the subject's readiness to make the change; taking the initiative for external training, especially on a volunteer basis, demonstrates such preparedness.

5.4 Mentoring

We found strong support for the positive effect of sales mentoring (H_2). The finding was not surprising as several studies have shed light on the benefits of mentoring and personal learning (Kram & Hall, 1989; Lankau & Scandura, 2007; Liu & Fu, 2011). Our results identify internal mentoring as having a significant association with personal learning, whereas, external mentoring (H_{2a}) did not which is consistent with the findings of other sales researchers (e.g., Hartmann et al., 2013). Considering internal mentors

have firsthand knowledge of the protégés work environment, they are in a position to offer guidance and resources specifically attuned to the protégés position within the organization.

Interactions with internal mentors give protégés a chance to observe and mimic the work behavior of their mentors in similar work settings. Likewise, internal mentoring allows protégés more opportunities to model job attitudes and behaviors that might not be available to external mentors. By observing or imitating the mentors' behavior in varying job scenarios, the protégé is able to recognize how their job is associated with others thereby increasing their personal learning.

Additional findings from the study regarding mentoring confirm that both informal and formal mentoring have positive effects on personal learning. That is, irrespective of the type of relationship, the results indicate both are effective in increasing personal learning. This finding implies that formal mentoring relationships which are designed and sanctioned by the organization do not differ from the spontaneously developed informal mentoring relationships in regard to the extent of learning experienced by the protégés. Although prior research suggests informal mentoring relationships are preferred by protégés (Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997; Ragins et al., 2000), the finding that both platforms are significant is consistent with the mixed results having been reported in extant literature regarding the outcomes of formal versus informal mentoring (Scandura & Williams, 2002). Thus, as Ragins et al., (2000) argued, it is too simplistic to assume that all informal mentoring relationships are more beneficial than formal mentoring relationships due to the advantage of spontaneity.

Instead, other key variables of the relationship, i.e., quality, functions, duration, etc.,

should be considered and is a direction for exploration by future researchers.

5.5 Coaching

Coaching was considered in this study as the on-going direction and instruction

provided to a salesperson for the purpose of increasing their sales competence. This

interaction may be provided by a supervisor or manager. Multiple studies have

documented positive results from the relationship between manager/supervisor support

and learning (e.g., Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Holton et al., 2000). Contrary to the

prediction in Hypothesis 3 (H_3), there was not a significant relationship between the

presence of a coach and personal learning. Researchers offer support for this finding as

some have reported doubts concerning the actual benefits of coaching (Kelly,1985). In

fact, few studies have been published on what actually constitutes effective coaching.

Several researchers have proposed possible outcomes of coaching (Carter, Hirsch &

Ashton, 2002). Sales coaching reportedly represents an untapped area of potential for

social and emotional learning (Kram & Cherniss, 2001) whereby ongoing development

may occur. However, very little research has provided empirical support for the benefit

of coaching relationships (Ellinger, 2004), and despite the recent attention the subject has

received, coaching seemingly remains an under-researched area in academia that should

be addressed by scholars in the future.

The relationship between coaching and personal learning was not confirmed, and

neither the mediated relationship nor the moderated relationship was significant. A direct

relationship between coaching and organizational commitment, however, was observed.

The relationship was not hypothesized in the study, however, the result is aligned with the literature on organizational commitment. Several studies have stressed the importance of the role of supervisors/managers in increasing organizational commitment (Kidd & Smewing, 2001; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Employees are more likely to be engaged in their work and committed to their jobs when they perceive they are receiving developmental support from their managers (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Mottaz, 1988, Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010). Conversely, the lack of managerial/supervisory support may be a reason why the benefits of coaching are not being realized. Further, it should be noted the amount or quantity of behaviors does not discriminate in successful versus unsuccessful coaching, it is the quality of those behaviors that would impact the results.

5.6 The Outcomes of Personal Learning

Personal learning was found to have a strong negative correlation with role ambiguity. Albeit somewhat intuitive that increased learning would decrease role ambiguity, there is little empirical support for the relationship. Lankau and Scandura (2002), found personal learning fully mediated the relationship between mentoring and role ambiguity. The current study tested the mediation between mentoring and role ambiguity and found no support for personal learning as a mediator. Instead, a direct relationship was observed between personal learning and role ambiguity as hypothesized in H_4. When taken in context of the sales job, this finding implies that learning helps the salesperson gain an increased understanding of what is expected in the role and regarding how the sales job is connected to that of others within the organization. The finding

underscores the value of personal learning in improving a salesperson's knowledge of how to perform job tasks and clarity in work expectations regardless of the source of the learning. Considering there are costs associated with role ambiguity both for the individual and for the organization (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek , 1964) our findings lend support for approaching learning as an investment that could offset the financial negative impact of role ambiguity which is documented as increasing emotional stress, decreasing job satisfaction, and increasing turnover intentions (Allen et al., 2006).

Personal learning was significantly related to affective organizational commitment (H_{5a}), continuance organizational commitment (H_{5b}), and normative organizational commitment (H_{5c}) as proposed in Hypotheses 5a-5c. Previous research on the antecedents of organizational commitment includes career development and comprehensive training opportunities (Paul & Anantharaman, 2004) and training satisfaction (Liu, 2006) as precursors to commitment. This literature indicates employee perceptions of their developmental opportunities and their satisfaction with those experiences play a critical role in building organizational commitment. When salespeople perceive they have the information needed to adequately perform their jobs (Churchill et al., 2000), and they have be given sufficient developmental opportunities, they are likely more committed to the organization.

5.7 Motivation.

The hypothesized moderating effect of motivation (H_{6a}-H_{6c}) was not supported by our data, however, the moderation analysis revealed a direct linkage between motivation and personal learning that was not hypothesized. The research results point to the critical

role motivation plays in enhancing a salesperson's learning, behavior and potentially

work outcomes. This is consistent with social psychology literature (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

on motivation; people who are intrinsically motivated are likely more creative on the job

by learning and applying effective success strategies. Others, who are extrinsically

motivated might be encouraged to acquire additional licenses and certifications if doing

so would increase compensation or bonuses. The fact that motivation had no effect on

either of the sales knowledge tools but was directly related to learning suggests that if an

individual is motivated, they can accomplish the desired learning outcomes regardless

how the information is presented. Thus, using motivational triggers to position learning

opportunities could enable employees to develop methods to improve their job outcomes.

5.8 Managerial Implications

Organizational leaders and executive management can benefit from this research

through the application of the findings in designing their learning initiatives. While

companies will vary in their emphasis on and approaches to specific employee

development strategies, those who wish to encourage personal learning as an approach

for decreasing role ambiguity and improving commitment among their salespeople

should consider the results from this study. The results indicate that perhaps

organizations should explore learning via channels other than those routinely used for

salesperson development. Doing so may ideally provide the salesperson an opportunity

to acquire the skills they need in a more efficient and effective manner, which can

translate into a competitive advantage.

Motivating employees to learn by providing opportunities for them to learn is likely to yield organization-wide advantages. Yet, time is extremely valuable for salespeople. Companies seeking to provide learning opportunities should take into account the time needed to complete the tasks. The goal should be to provide the most effective ways to train as opposed to only trying to save money on training. Although external trainers do not always provide the best ROI, when companies select internal training simply because it is less expensive, they could be selecting a less effective training method as well.

Our data suggests that organizations should encourage learning through less direct channels such as behavior management (e.g., mentoring programs, outside training opportunities) (Taylor et al., 2009), which extends beyond the traditional classroom training methods. Organizations should consider allowing employees the flexibility to participate in activities both inside and outside of the workplace that increase overall sales competence and learning. Perhaps another strategy is for firms to consider the establishment of learning communities (Brown & Duguid, 1991) which are less about providing a structured format that dictates how the learning is to transpire and more about allowing a context in which the salesperson can develop their own competence.

It is incumbent upon companies to consider the use of their own resources to prepare their salesforce to meet the challenges they will face in their positions. Organizations looking to develop a blueprint for learning should aim to provide support and help people maximize their potential by managing their own learning (Parsloe & Wray, 2000). This agenda is best accomplished through instituting plans for performance

development that are more heavily weighted on the employee's actions towards their own improvement, possibly with the support of a mentor. The empirical results regarding the impact of mentoring learned from this study reinforce the need for organizations to support mentoring as a strategy to allow for this self-management process through the use of formal and informal mentoring programs. In this scenario, the mentor's role would be to encourage the development of self-awareness in the learner and to influence learners to seek out solutions to their own problems. That is, instead of being the source of knowledge, the mentor would be available to direct learners to the appropriate source for them to access the information they need on their own.

Although coaching and mentoring are sometimes considered as synonymous, there can be considerable differences between them. It is worthwhile for organizations to advance techniques to distinguish the benefits of each and incorporate methods to utilize both. Coaching can be a particularly useful tool to encourage on-going performance. Gregoire et al. (1998) found coaching effects employee perceptions of learning. When salespeople feel they have the support of coaching after a learning event, they are more likely to view the experience and the company more favorably. The results of this study suggest the advantages of coaching extend beyond the context of actual learning. Instead, we discovered that the presence of a coach appears to effect long-term organizational behavior. Given the expected demand for quality salespeople in the future, our findings suggest that coaching may foster the type of environment that would create more committed salespeople; potentially allowing for improved employee retention.

5.9 Theoretical Implications

The findings from this study are beneficial not only for mentoring researchers but also for transfer scholars and those looking to explore more comprehensive methods to evaluate sales training. One of the major challenges in sales mentoring research comes in identifying the contextual factors which lead to the development of successful mentoring relationships. Researchers have worked to delineate the underlying processes of inter-organizational and intra-organizational mentoring (Hartmann et al., 2013) including the conditions that affect the outcomes of these relationships. To this end, it is important to understand how boundary conditions impact the protégés and the effectiveness of the relationship (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2005; Chao, Walz & Gardner , 1992; Haggard et al., 2011; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000).

Our findings advance extant literature by providing insight into how the source of the mentor (e.g., Chao, 1998) and the mentor's classification (Ragins et al, 2000; Sandura & Williams, 2002) affects the dynamics of the relationship and the transference that occurs as a result. We offer empirical support that work outcomes are influenced by the proximity of the mentoring relationship (i.e., internal) and the degree of formality (i.e., formal/informal). Given the sparse availability of information on sales mentoring relationships, the findings in this study are helpful to those seeking to understand how a salesperson's behavioral and/or attitudinal outcomes relate to their mentoring status.

For decades, researchers have worked to develop a general theory of learning transfer. Although Kirkpatrick's (1976) evaluation typology is the most commonly used, scholars continue to work toward identifying more inclusive frameworks (Attia et al.,

2005; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Van Buren & Erskine, 2002). This has turned out

as a difficult challenge for researchers. Thus, scholars interested in understanding

additional factors that foster increased learning transfer would find this study particularly

helpful. Our work contributes to existing literature regarding the effect trainee's

characteristics, such as motivation to learn and the learning environment (Holton, 1996),

have on transfer results.

Training scholars have suggested moving toward more testable models evaluation

(e.g., Holton, 1996). As such, we developed and tested a model which incorporated

environmental factors along with Tannenbaum et al.'s (1991) views on training

evaluation. Through the combination of these models it was established by our findings

that organizations benefit when trainees apply learned behaviors back on the job. In this

regard, decreased role ambiguity and increased organizational commitment were seen as

attainments a salesperson would gain by way of training, mentoring and/or coaching.

Our study sets forth a new conceptualization of the theory on learning and evaluation

whereby performance is measured as the extent to which a salesperson has achieved

personal learning.

5.10 Limitations

The findings of this study are subject to several limitations. First, the study relied

on self-reported measures, as such self- report bias is sometimes problematic. The bias is

the result of the participants' desire to "respond in a way that makes them look as good as

possible." (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002, p. 247). To reduce the potential of self-

report bias, respondents were assured of the anonymity of their responses. Previous

research has used similar self-report measures to explore transfer (e.g., Chiaburu & Tekleab, 2005; Facteau et al.,1995), providing evidence that employees can accurately self-report their levels of transfer. Nonetheless, additional precautions were taken as well. We used anonymous surveys to enhance the accuracy of the data reported, and no identifying information was gathered or stored for the study. Further, to avoid the potential of common methods bias from self-reports, methods checks were performed and marker variables were used. It was determined that the items selected for marker variables were too closely associated with the context of the outcome variables and were not correct for this study.   However, as per the guidelines outlined by Podsakoff et al. (2003), the low correlation between the constructs in the study indicated the measures did not likely inflate the association between the study's determinants and the outcomes.

This research used cross-sectional design which is an additional limitation of the study. As a cross-sectional study, the data were collected at a single point in time. As the sales environment and salesperson's behavior may change over time, how they would respond to the survey items may also change over time. Thus, a more robust approach involving longitudinal data collection over a period of time would be more representative of an enduring prospective of the variables being observed.

A further limitation is the current study relied solely on survey data to explore the outcomes set forth. For future research, we suggest using additional methods in order to reinforce the self-report data and foster a more in-depth investigation of learning transfer in the sales environment.

5.11 Future Research

Training costs are estimated at close to $130 billion annually (ASTD, 2010); however, organizational leaders generally agree there is seldom any real change when employees return to work (Ricks, Williams, & Weeks, 2008). There is no doubt that organizations are interested in understanding where to invest their training dollars in to yield the best return. Our results have several implications for future research, especially in the areas of mentoring, coaching and motivation.

First, it would appear there should be differences in the type of support provided by formal mentors as opposed to informal mentoring relationships, yet, we could not determine a statistical difference between formal mentoring and informal mentoring in regard to the effect the relationship had on personal learning. Mixed results have been reported regarding outcomes of formal versus informal mentoring (Scandura & Williams, 2002), thus, further research is needed on how the degree of formality affects the mentoring relationship. It is suggested that future researchers investigate specific functions including career functions (exposure, visibility coaching, sponsorship, protection, and providing challenging assignments) and psychosocial functions (role modeling, acceptance, confirmation, counseling and friendship) provided in both types of mentoring relationships.

Next, future researchers should explore alternative models for predicting organizational commitment through the use of mentoring and coaching in the sales environment. In our study, internal mentoring was directly related to all of the commitment variables. We also found personal learning fully mediated the relationship

between internal mentoring and affective organizational commitment and continuance organizational commitment. It stands to reason, however, that normative commitment would increase as employees are exposed to professional development experiences because they would feel an obligation to remain with the organization and put forth extra effort to repay them for the investment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). That said, our results indicate other variables should be considered in the future to better explain the relationship between the various aspects of mentoring and organizational commitment, and we suggest this as an avenue for future research.

Many studies have linked increased organizational commitment to the role the manager plays in the employee's development (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). However, these studies detail the specific behaviors supervisors should exhibit to have a positive effect on their employees. Employees are more likely to feel engaged with the organization when they perceive their managers/supervisors support them (Mottaz, 1988). When supervisors engage in coaching activities, they create a sense of ownership and empowerment in the employee that can lead to increased organizational commitment. In addition, when employees are happy and satisfied with their manager it enhances the employees' sense of affection and belonging and thereby strengthens their attachment to the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Future scholars should consider possible moderators and mediators that may influence how coaching impacts employees' organizational commitment. More importantly, future scholars should examine the functions and activities performed by coaches that may further explain these behavioral outcomes.

One striking result from the current research was the impact motivation had on several of the variables in the study. Reseachers have investigated both extrinsic and intrinsic factors as influences on transfer (Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993; Santos & Stuart, 2003; Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Chan, 2005; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanagh, 1995) with the findings suggesting intrinsic factors have a strong impact on transfer outcomes. However, given extrinsic motivation is an antecedent of sales performance (Verbeke, 2010), it would be worthwhile for future researchers to investigate learning motivation in the sales environment, specifically. Understanding the motivational triggers of salespeople and identifying key motivating factors could help organizations position learning opportunities toward those motivators.

Our findings confirm that motivation is positively related to personal learning. Therefore, a study of its antecedents (Colquitt et al., 2000; Tharenou, 2001) would be beneficial. Even better would be a longitudinal study tracking motivation, learning knowledge tools and strategies used would be useful. Researchers should consider a study which integrates the findings of this study with earlier research on training settings and methods (Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992) to develop a more comprehensive model explaining transfer in the sales environment and a more a testable model for the evaluation of training effectiveness.

Finally, future researchers should examine engagement as an outcome of learning in the sales environment. Work engagement is concerned with how individuals exert themselves in the performance of their job. Furthermore, engagement involves the active use of emotions and behaviors in addition to cognitions. Research on burnout and

engagement have revealed that that the core dimensions of burnout (exhaustion and cynicism) and the core dimensions of engagement (vigor and dedication) are opposites (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006) and burnout researchers conceptualize the engagement construct as the positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Engaged employees work hard, are enthusiastic about their work, and fully immerse themselves in their job activities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Therefore, although it is worthwhile to understand what would make salespeople want to stay on the job, it is also beneficial to investigate the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components associated with specific role performance (Robinson et al., 2004).

5.12 Conclusion

Determining the most effective and cost efficient method to encourage the sales force to transfer learning for improved results continues to plague organizational leaders. The results of this study indicate external training and internal mentoring could be particularly useful in addressing low rates of learning transfer. Ultimately, increased personal learning yields favorable outcomes for employees in that they experience decreased role ambiguity. Furthermore, personal learning yields favorable outcomes for organizations through increased organizational commitment.

Although the limitations of this study should be taken into account when interpreting our results, these limitations should also motivate scholars to investigate this subject in the future to validate the findings and to expand our knowledge of how training, mentoring and coaching influences learning in the sales environment. Specifically, considering several hypotheses in the study were not supported by our data,

scholars should focus their efforts on determining factors that better explain a salesperson's skill acquisition. Also, researchers should continue to examine motivational influences and outcomes that impact post-training skill acquisition as well as the salesperson's attitudes and behaviors. Further, continued theory development is warranted to uncover other intervening mechanisms linking training, mentoring and coaching to learning, role ambiguity and organizational commitment.

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