

THE SEARCH FOR SPONTANEITY: ADAPTIVE SELLING IN THE SALES PROCESS AND CORPORATE TRAINING

*Dr. Mick Jackowski, Metropolitan State University of Denver, 890 Auraria Parkway, Denver, CO
80204, 303-615-0522, mjackows@msudenver.edu*

*Ms. April Schofield, Metropolitan State University of Denver, 890 Auraria Parkway, Denver, CO
80204, 303-615-0520, aschofi3@msudenver.edu*

*Dr. Clay Daughtrey, Metropolitan State University of Denver, 890 Auraria Parkway, Denver, CO
80204, 303-615-0524, daughtre@msudenver.edu*

*Dr. Sally Baalbaki-Yassine, Metropolitan State University of Denver, 890 Auraria Parkway, Denver,
CO 80204, 303-615-0517, baalbaki@msudenver.edu*

ABSTRACT

This study investigates where adaptive selling fits in the sales process and begins the exploration of company training of this skill. Given the limited theory about adaptive selling as it relates to organizational training, an investigator triangulation content analysis case study of the sales training regimen within a large corporation was conducted. The results integrated adaptive selling as a contributor to value-based selling and supported the notion that although adaptive selling techniques are essential success factors for performance, they are not always a core component in organizational training.

Keywords: sales, adaptive selling, customer orientation, value-based selling

INTRODUCTION

Adaptive selling can be defined as “the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation” [64, p. 175]. One’s ability to improvise is vital to not only personal career success [36], but also to the effectiveness of workplace teams [57] and organizations as a whole [21] [58]. Notwithstanding this evidence, little attention is paid by corporations to enhancing the ability of their salespeople to adapt quickly to changing circumstances because “there is a persistent focus...on teaching product and industry knowledge as opposed to selling skills” [6]. This fact is especially notable since the salesforce of a company is often at the vanguard of developing potential and maintaining current customer relationships. The COVID-19 situation is an example of the significance of adaptability. Sales process changes were instantaneously forced upon salespeople as they moved to selling virtually. Research estimates that many sales professionals may not be able to get face-to-face with customers, indicating that pivoting to new processes or technologies and adaptability is required [8]. For these reasons, this study investigates the level of priority that sales organizations place on helping their salespeople excel at adaptive selling.

Bollman et al. [38] wrote that “if theory is the basis for understanding the reality of sales, it would seem reasonable to assume that what we tell managers and salespeople relates with what they experience in the field” (p 17). However, those same authors identified the existence of gaps between research conducted in the field of sales and actual practice in the profession. One of the primary gaps these authors examined was in adaptive selling, which reiterates the same deficiency first identified by Töytäri, Brashear,

Parvinen, Ollila, and Rosendahl [53] and is defined as adjustments at the business process level by one or both parties with the intent of initiating business engagement between the buyer and seller [60]. Chonko and Jones [25] also identified adaptive selling as a developed skill that enables salespeople to assess customers' wants/needs and then respond quickly and accurately to increasing customer demand. This gap is meaningful because salespeople who engage in adaptive selling behaviors achieve higher levels of sales performance [2] [18] [50], as well as increasing both salesperson's job satisfaction [15] and customers' satisfaction [45]. Despite this documentation, this key facet of selling behavior is often given short shrift in the training regimen of companies [10] [17], though it was found to be important to salespeople themselves [1].

Though considerable research identifies adaptive selling as important to sales success within an organization [61] [22] [55] [56] [27] [47] [19] [20], there is a dearth of observation about this facet of the sales process in corporate training programs. Because of this shortcoming, this study evaluates the sales training of a corporation as well as the role of adaptive selling in the sales process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A first step to better understand adaptive selling is to identify its place in the selling process. Terho, Haas, Eggert, and Ulaga [51], as part of their multi-level framework, developed a conceptual model for sales strategy that begins with customer orientation, which in turn leads to value-based selling and sales performance (Figure 1).

Figure 1

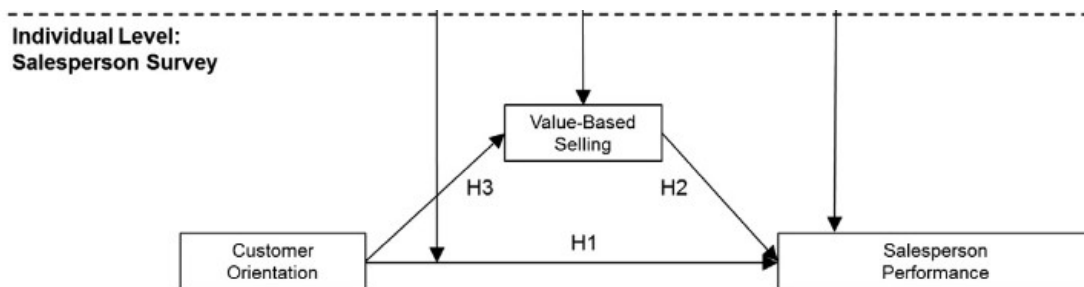


Fig. 1. Multilevel conceptual model.

The most obvious takeaway from this model is the absence of adaptive selling, but we will first review the model as is, beginning with customer orientation. As suggested by Verbeke, Dietz, and Verwaal [59], salespeople have developed into knowledge brokers where among their primary roles is the dissemination of information to customers, as well as remaining abreast of current marketplace challenges that may affect customer business outcomes. However, Friend, Curasi, Boles, and Bellenger [16] found that:

“...a strong driver of sales failure is in firms that do not understand their needs and problems, do not have the ability to adapt to different sets of needs that exist among often different clients, and/or do not have an attitude that fosters adaptation to specific, perhaps even unusual, buyer requirements. p. 1132

All of these shortcomings point to salespeople lacking proper customer orientation. Customer-oriented representatives engage in the free-flow of information where they listen to their customers and desire to learn about their needs so they can co-create solutions [5]. The extant literature has noted customer orientation as a key antecedent to both adaptive selling [18] [30] and successful sales performance [11] [18] [30] [51] [66]. More specifically, the impact of a salesperson's customer orientation on customer loyalty is pronounced regardless of the buyer-type, strength of the brand and complexity of the product [26].

Customer orientation, however, is not enough. Evidence exists that successful salespeople will not perform to expectations if they have only their customers' best interests in mind. Two meta-analyses [15] [66] found no consistent effect of customer orientation alone on salesperson performance. For this reason, one can view customer orientation as a starting point, an imperative work value because it not only precedes the use of, it motivates salespeople to adopt value based selling practices, the next key indicator of sales performance in business markets [52]. These authors defined value-based selling as "the degree to which the salesperson works with the customer to craft a market offering in such a way that benefits are translated into monetary terms, based on an in-depth understanding of the customer's business model, thereby convincingly demonstrating their contribution to customers' profitability" [52, p. 178].

Accordingly, salespeople are effective not only to the degree to which they meet customer needs, but also to the extent to which their selling approaches facilitate customer value creation [39] [50] [52]. The central aspects of value-based selling behaviors are efforts to (a) understand the customer's business and the related value creation opportunities, (b) be proactive in crafting value propositions that are substantive from customer's point of view, and (c) communicate the value potential to the customer [52].

As seen in Figure 1, these studies connect customer orientation to value-based selling, followed by the outcome of sales performance. However, where does adaptive selling fall in this continuum? Scant research exists regarding the relationship between value-based selling and adaptive selling, which can be at least partially explained because numerous studies define them as virtually one and the same [51] [52] [53], while Viio and Nordin [62] identified adaptive selling as a subset of value-based selling. However, ample research identifies them as distinct skill sets. As an example, if salespeople tailor their presentations based on information they've gleaned from customers so they can provide value (i.e., value-based selling), then the step of observing the reactions of these customers to each presentation and quickly adjust to new circumstances [61] [22] can be seen as an antecedent to value-based selling. This thinking aligns itself with other studies that identified adapting to the other party as a means of providing, co-creating [55] [56] or enabling value creation [19] [20]. Although not identified at the individual salesperson level, Liu and Zhao [34] did identify organizational adaptive culture as an antecedent to value-based sales.

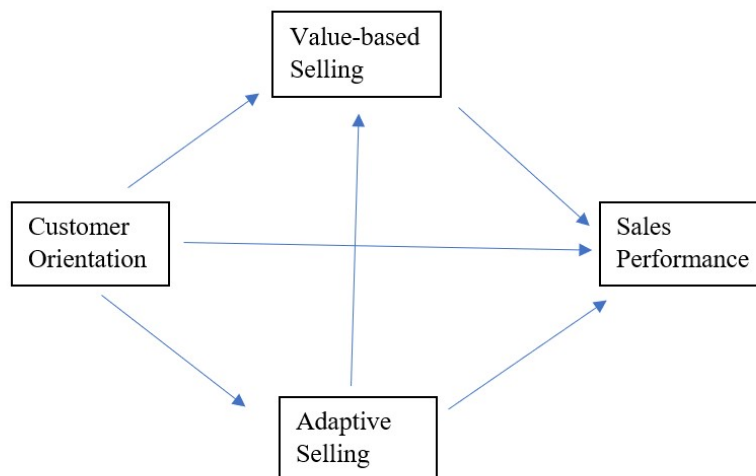
As such, one can view value-based selling as a strategic plan if you will, whereas adaptive selling relates more to tactical maneuvers employed in the heat of battle. Salespeople may engage in extensive preparations to anticipate and direct customer encounters to create relationship value, but they "are ultimately dependent on buyer interpretations and cooperation" [37, p. 22]. Salespeople will make assumptions of the customer's interpretation of their own situation and problem either by interpreting their actions or by adopting the customer's perspective. While these salesperson activities are mostly described as intentional, they do not have to be consciously planned; they can also be ad-hoc or reactive, that is, adaptive selling [27] [47].

Hohenschwert and Geiger [27] provided an example to illustrate how this works:

“...a salesperson might offer a cost saving solution because he or she interpreted a preceding interaction to mean that the customer contact is under pressure to reduce costs. However, that salesperson could then encounter a negative reaction due to the customer ‘misinterpreting’ the solution as increased workload instead, and in that case would have to adapt to the evolving interaction (p. 140)

To achieve utmost effectiveness from this perspective, salespeople should plan on utilizing both value based and adaptive selling techniques. Planning for adaptation of the sales process can shorten the sales cycle, improve resource allocation, result in a faster return on investment, and strengthen the projected relationship [60] [61]. It would then seem that all these facets--customer orientation, value-based selling, adaptive selling, and sales performance—can be included as unique categories in the sales process, which adds depth to Terho et al.’s [51] model (See updated model in Figure 2 below):

Figure 2



However, though it is one thing to stress the importance of adaptive selling in the sales process, it is quite another to prepare new salespeople to be adept at it. Research indicates that much of the time, the best teacher of selling adaptability is experience in the field [10] [17]. But leaving this key component of the sales process to the experiential intuition of the salesperson is fraught with risk since a vast amount of the problems in sales performance rests on the seller’s lack of adaptive-selling capabilities [16]. Results from a study conducted by the Sales Management Association (SMA) found that less than 20% of new sales hires are successful [46] and ultimately leave their jobs within two years. Based on these less-than-optimal results, otherwise talented salespeople may not last long enough to develop adaptive selling skills on their own.

This failure rate is made more significant if one considers that U.S. companies spend over \$70 billion annually on training, and an average of \$1,459 per salesperson — almost 20 percent more than they spend on workers in all other functions [9]. The SMA study concluded that primary reasons for this high rate of

attrition are poor coaching, training, and development. It would seem, therefore, that more focus should be placed on the conduct of the sales organization, rather than the salesperson, to develop a more customer focused [33] and consultative selling firm [48]. Friend et. al [16] recommended that organizations can decrease sales failures with better training, specifically by distilling the precise needs of the buyer that differ from typical customers. To better understand the level of emphasis placed on adaptive selling by an organization, this study will examine organizations' training regimen through the lens of the management field, using the hierarchy of knowledge as developed by Quinn, Anderson, and Finkelstein [39].

METHODOLOGY

When sales organizations place more emphasis on salesperson adaptiveness, training will move beyond fact finding and emphasize true information gathering [7]. Given the limited theory about adaptive selling as it relates to organizational training, an investigator triangulation content analysis case study of the sales training regimen within a large corporation was conducted as a first step to investigate this in practice.

Single-case studies allow researchers to uncover and illustrate the main features of processes, relationships and networks emerging within complex phenomena, which are still under-researched [23] [49] [63]. They help in addressing "how" and "why" research questions [65].

The case study utilized a directed content analysis of a single company's sales training procedures, provided via email from an executive who oversees sales training in the company under study. The company is one of the largest sales organizations in the truck leasing industry, mainly due to its strong national brand recognition, and was selected for this study because of these characteristics. A logical first step in a study about sales training is to determine the protocols of a company that has demonstrated longterm effectiveness. This market leader organizes its sales training into four phases that will be analyzed:

- a) onboarding systems (conducted within 30 days of start date)
- b) foundational values (conducted within 90 days of start date)
- c) intermediate training (conducted within 4-5 months of start date)
- d) advanced sales training (conducted within 18 months to 2 years of start date)

Directed Content Analysis

According to Hsieh and Shannon [28], "the goal of a directed approach to content analysis is to...extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (p. 1281) and begins by identifying key concepts as initial coding categories. Quinn et al.'s [39] work identified the following four categories of human intellect that are necessary for an organization to be effective, from least to most important:

- Cognitive Knowledge (know-what)
 - Learn the basic mastery of information
- Procedural Knowledge (Advanced know-how)
 - Apply the rules of a discipline to complex real-world problems
- Causal Knowledge/Systems Understanding (Know-why)
 - Find deeper knowledge of cause-and-effect relationships
- Self-motivated Creativity (Care-why)
 - Instill will, motivation, and adaptability.

This process is ideal to measure how an organization teaches their sales personnel because Quinn et. al [40] found that:

“The value of a firm’s intellect increases markedly as one moves up the intellectual scale from cognitive knowledge toward motivated creativity. Yet...most enterprises reverse this priority in their training...expenditures, focusing virtually all their attention on basic (rather than advanced) skills development and little or none on motivational or creative skills (p.7).

Investigator Triangulation

Investigator triangulation was utilized because this study examines the formal and singular sales training procedures within a corporate entity, and as such, only one source of information existed for examination. Reviewers experienced in sales education examined the training outline provided by the corporation. Because part of this method is the recognition that interpreters bring their own pre-judgements to the analysis [25], three coders were used to discount these personal biases. Reviewers followed the protocol of hermeneutic inquiry that uncovers “meanings and intentions that are, in a sense, hidden in the text” [13, p. 91].

The coders reviewed the training procedures (see Appendix) and assigned one of the four components found in the corporate Hierarchy of Knowledge to each item. Although one part of this approach is to increase validity by finding commonality in the cataloguing between reviewers, overemphasis on confirmation undercuts the potential of triangulation to generate further questions and understandings [4]. Contemporary content analysis uses a juxtaposition of quantitative and qualitative methods [24] to gain more insight into the meaning of the data. Accordingly, after each researcher examined the training outline, they met to discuss the data and either change their analysis or leave their results if no consensus was realized. In the results section below, we display the specific coding results for all three reviewers in separate tables.

RESULTS

Reliability

Inter-coder reliability was computed using the percent agreement method - the most widely used method in various research fields and an acceptable method when coding is relatively simple and does not exceed four categories [14]. Average pairwise percentage agreement was 90.48%, which is more than the acceptable result of 66.6% agreement for research that is breaking new ground [43].

Onboarding Systems (Within 30 days of start)

The coders found that sales training during the first month of employment was predominantly Cognitive, learning the knowledge necessary to perform the job, and Procedural, applying this knowledge to the salesperson’s upcoming tasks. For the CRM, most sales training was cognitive, whereas the training on content/libraries was more procedural (see Table 1). For the specs/rating systems, the trainings were mainly cognitive, except for the documents/contract maintenance which was procedural (see Table 2). For the partner info trainings, the overview and critical reports were mainly cognitive, while the navigation was mainly procedural (see Table 3). These findings are understandable since the new hire must first learn

the components of the company’s customer relationship management system (CRM), as well as the specifications of their own inventory and supplier/service partners.

Table 1. CRM Trainings

CRM	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Support Team	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Navigation	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Prospecting	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Mapping	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Customer Calls	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Content/Libraries	Procedural	Procedural	Procedural
Reports/Dashboards	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive

Table 2. Specifications and Ratings Systems Trainings

Specs/Ratings Systems	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Overview	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
New Service Lease Equipment	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Used Equipment	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Documents/Contract Maintenance	Procedural	Procedural	Procedural
Workflows	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive

Table 3. Partner Information Trainings

Partner Info	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Overview	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Navigation	Procedural	Procedural	Causal
Critical Reports	Procedural	Cognitive	Cognitive

Foundational Value of Company (Within 90 days of start)

In the first three months of training, much of the knowledge processed is still Cognitive and Procedural, with evidence of more Causal aspects being shared by the company. In the foundational value of the company trainings, most were cognitive, while sales executive training, credit training, risk management training, contract administration, and vehicle supply training were causal (see Table 4). For selling skills trainings, prospect qualification, market analysis, and prospecting trainings are all procedural. Product training, commercial excellence, and sector blitzing are all cognitive. The only causal training was discovery/positioning (see Table 5). The account management trainings, which includes customer experience and marketing, are causal (see Table 6). Finally, all the product/value trainings are cognitive (see Table 7). Working with sales executives in the corporation, as well as new hire learning of credit options, risk management, contract administration, vehicle/supply training, customer

discovery/positioning, and customer service gave salespeople more in-depth knowledge of cause-and-effect relationships.

Table 4. Foundational Value of the Company Trainings

Foundational Value of Company	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Sales Executives	Causal	Causal	Causal
Credit	Causal	Cognitive	Causal
Legal	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Risk Management	Causal	Causal	Causal
Contract Administration	Causal	Causal	Causal
Vehicle Supply/Training	Causal	Cognitive	Causal
Inside Sales Overview	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Monitoring Systems	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
24/7 Tour	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive

Table 5. Selling Skills Trainings

Selling Skills	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Prospect Qualification	Procedural	Procedural	Procedural
Discovery/Positioning	Causal	Causal	Causal
Product Training	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Market Analysis	Procedural	Procedural	Procedural
Prospecting	Procedural	Procedural	Procedural
Commercial Excellence	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Sector Blitzing	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive

Table 6. Account Management Trainings

Account Management	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Customer Experience/Marketing	Causal	Causal	Causal

Table 7. Product/Value Trainings

Product/Value	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
See2Lease	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Rate Sheet	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Collateral	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Vehicle Applications	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Finance 101	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive

Maintenance Vision	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
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Foundational Value of Company (Within 4-5 months of start)

Coders found that the final new hire sales training phase regimen concentrated more on Procedural and Causal components and included the only two instances related to adaptive selling---Self-motivated creativity. In the sales executives trainings, sell2lease and legal trainings were cognitive, while the networking event was self-motivated creativity (see Table 8). The networking event was with internal sales executives, and although it requires salespeople to think on their feet, it may not be directly attributable to the sales process that they will need to excel in the field. For the selling skills trainings, the new sales process refresher, the facility tour, and the industry specific processes/products were considered cognitive. The lease vs. buy analysis and the comparative value analysis were procedural. The remaining trainings were all causal (see Table 9). The account management trainings were all considered cognitive and causal (see Table 10). The product/value trainings were mainly coded as procedural (see Table 11). The selling skills trainings were cognitive and procedural (see Table 12). Finally, in the case study trainings there were some differences. Although operational and financial fact-finding meetings were considered causal, capabilities presentation was considered procedural/causal. The biggest discrepancy between reviewers was seen in the proposal to GM and CFO, where one reviewer saw it as self-motivated creativity, another viewed it as causal, and the final perceived it to be procedural (see Table 13). The lack of consensus for this item may be the result of the unknown happenings that occur during this final part of new sales training.

Table 8. Sales Executives Trainings

Sales Executives	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Sell2Lease	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Legal	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Networking Event	Self-motivated Creativity	Self-motivated Creativity	Self-motivated Creativity

Table 9. Selling Skills Trainings

Selling Skills	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
New Sales Process Refresher	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
New Sales Process Nurturing	Causal	Causal	Causal
Strategic Prospecting	Causal	Causal	Procedural
Probing Questions	Causal	Causal	Causal
Facility Tour	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Lease vs. Buy Analysis	Procedural	Procedural	Procedural
Industry Specific Processes/Products	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive

Comparative Value Analysis	Procedural	Procedural	Procedural
Behavioral Styles	Causal	Causal	Causal

Table 10. Account Management Trainings

Account Management	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Customer Review	Cognitive	Cognitive	Procedural
Account Strategy	Causal	Causal	Causal
Fleet Services	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive

Table 11. Product/Value Trainings

Product/Value	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Proposal/Capabilities	Procedural	Causal	Procedural
On-site Workout	Procedural	Procedural	Causal
Inside Sales: List Development	Procedural	Procedural	Procedural

Table 12. Selling Skills Trainings

Selling Skills	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Financial Fitness	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive
Presentation Skills	Procedural	Procedural	Procedural
New Sales Process Refresher	Cognitive	Cognitive	Cognitive

Table 13. Case Study Trainings

Case Study	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2	Reviewer #3
Operational Fact-finding Meeting	Causal	Causal	Causal
Capabilities Presentation	Procedural	Causal	Procedural
Financial Fact-finding Meeting	Causal	Causal	Causal
Proposal to GM and CFO	Self-motivated Creativity	Causal	Procedural

DISCUSSION

One objective of this study was to further the research with respect to the need for organizations to better train their account executives in the art of adaptive selling. The results of this study support the notion that

although adaptive selling techniques are essential success factors for performance, they are not always a core component in organizational training. This finding reinforces studies that found that organizational commitment to adaptive selling is a driver of salesperson success [2] [29], though it is normally not part of an organization's training regimen [10] [17].

Our research also further differentiated adaptive selling in the sales process continuum, placing it as a contributor to value-based selling (Figure 2). This heightened awareness of its importance is vital based on previous findings of adaptability not being addressed by sales management [31] [3].

In the corporate training program evaluated, two out of sixty-three training instances were coded as adaptive selling: a networking event with internal sales executives, and a proposal to the General Manager and Chief Financial Officer. It was evident that sales training is a priority to this company, as ongoing, structured training is provided to all salespeople. The cognitive, procedural, and causal instances are essential, but by themselves may not arm all salespeople with the capability to adapt to selling situations with unexpected turns, different buyers, and unique needs.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Understanding the components of a successful sales training program is of critical importance to managers. In the U.S., companies spend more on sales training per capita than any other function [9]. This high investment is compounded by high turnover: Results from a study conducted by the Sales Management Association (SMA) found that less than 20% of new sales hires are successful [46] and ultimately leave their jobs within two years. The Sales Education Foundation estimates that over 60% of all first-time salespeople fail within a year of employment [54].

Though considerable research identified adaptive selling as important to sales success within an organization [61] [22] [55] [56] [27] [47] [19] [20], this case study highlighted that a major company did not sufficiently address adaptability in their sales training program.

Rather than teaching adaptability in the field, managers can better equip salespeople by emphasizing agility in training programs. Unexpected objections, interruptions, and technical failures are among the myriad of events salespeople will encounter in the field. The benefits of sales training are limited if the learning experience does not replicate real-world sales [44]. Organizations looking to optimize sales performance need to implement opportunities for salespeople to exercise agility throughout training, rather than deferring it to customer-facing scenarios.

One additional managerial implication to consider is the opportunity to recruit candidates who receive professional sales education at the university level. Students who graduate from formal university sales programs tend to ramp up 50% faster than their non-sales educated peers, turn over 30% less than their counterparts, and save an employer over \$200,000 within the first 12 months of employment [54]. More universities are offering sales-specific courses and degree programs. This is evident in growth of the University Sales Center Alliance, which increased from 30 member universities in 2014 to 57 in 2020 [54]. Such programs can provide sales managers with direct access to candidates with fundamental selling skills. Similarly, university sales educators should include adaptability in experiential exercises, such as roleplays, and real-time competitions. It is important to remember that the company under review is a leader in its industry and has demonstrated organizational effectiveness over decades. Still, and just as

great companies continue to grow in the marketplace, it seems that this corporation could find yet another avenue where it can expound on its impressive track record.

Of course, if one of the best companies in its field has room for sales training improvement, one can hypothesize that many other companies could benefit by doing the same. Yet, this recommendation is not new. The problem of not teaching employees to be self-motivated and creative was first recognized by Quinn et al. [39] over 20 years ago. It seems that the same problem could still persist today in the sales function of organizations. There is always a better way to execute in any organization, and the task of formalizing sales adaptability training could be one more opportunity to harness greater returns.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The case study research method used in this study comes with real and perceived limitations [42] which should be addressed. The first limitation of this study is that the results cannot be generalized to a broader population since only one company was studied. However, generalization was not the goal of the study. Exploratory research was needed in this area due to the dearth of research on adaptive selling training. The case study method is a common research strategy used in exploratory research and can be used to provide direction for future research. The purpose of the study was to determine if and how adaptive selling was covered in sales training. Future research should compare different companies in diverse industries in order to be able to generalize the results across industries and types of companies. The company chosen for the case study is a well-known brand and a leader in its industry thus providing a valuable contribution to the existent literature on adaptive selling training.

Another limitation is centered on the bias of the researchers themselves. In this instance, the three researchers involved with data triangulation were all professors in a university sales program who were specifically interested in the application of adaptive selling in sales training programs. It would be interesting to have non-sales professors code the same data to determine the congruity or difference between the results. Future research should incorporate sales professors, non-sales professors, and non-academics as reviewers to gain a larger perspective for coding purposes.

Lastly, the results of this study will be difficult to replicate. Interest in the topic, interest in the studied company, extensive knowledge of adaptive selling, stage of career, and research experience are all areas that could lead other researchers to come up with different results. The researchers are not claiming that the conclusions of the study would apply to all sales training programs. However, the conclusions could encourage companies to review their own processes to determine how and to what extent adaptive selling is learned through the course of their sales training programs.

Results of this study provided insight for future research. Adaptive selling is a novel topic in the professional selling body of knowledge and this case study highlighted that a major company did not sufficiently address this topic in their sales training program. Future studies could look to determine if adaptive selling is included in the training programs of other companies and/or industries and how it was incorporated. Additionally, an investigation of the sales training programs that do incorporate adaptive selling as part of the curriculum would be a valuable contribution to the literature to determine if that training was successful.

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APPENDIX

<u>Onboarding Systems (within 30 days of start)</u>		
<i>Customer Relationship Management System (CRM)</i>		
1	Support Team	
2	Navigating CRM	Tactical review of CRM tools and usage. Introduction to: a) vehicle specification/rating sections; b) sales call management; c) call entry process; and, d) email processes.
3	Prospecting	Sorting prospects by potential and monitoring visitation schedules through CRM reports and dashboard tools. Review CRM links to register fleet counts and financial analytics.
4	Mapping	Proximity map of prospects and assigned accounts
5	Customer Calls	Call schedules and entry into CRM
6	Content and Libraries	Case studies and industry updates housed in CRM
7	Reports and Dashboards	Management and activity reports navigation
<i>Specifications and Ratings Systems</i>		
1	Overview	
2	New Fleet Service Lease Equipment	New equipment specification process (chassis, body, liftgate, refrigeration equipment, matching powertrain to customer application).
3	Used Equipment	Used equipment specification process.
4	Documents and Contract Maintenance	Rating lease contracts and creating needed schedules/contracts in Salesforce.
5	Workflows	Creating and submitting workflow requests for vehicle application approvals and overrides.
<i>Partner Information</i>		

		Review of fleet management reporting and tools usage. Obtain data used to monitor lease terms for renewal opportunities and provide summary data to customers	
	1	Overview	
	2	Navigation	
	3	Critical Reports	

<u>Foundational Value of Company (within 90 days of start)</u>			
			Discussion with key department leaders regarding guidelines needed for contract agreements and best practices when negotiating deals for final approval.
	1	Sales Executives	
	2	Credit	
	3	Legal	
	4	Risk Management	
	5	Contract Administration	
	6	Vehicle Supply and Training	
	7	Inside Sales Overview	
	8	Monitoring Systems	Proprietary applications for drivers and managers to monitor equipment, locate services, repair order requests, monitor 24/7 events.
	9	24/7 Tour	Roadside assistance and repair department.
	<i>Selling Skills</i>		

			<p>a) Prospect qualification – needs assessment, time, credit and operational review, buyers involved – understand buyer behavioral styles</p> <p>b) Discovery/Positioning – differentiation, capabilities – people and facilities, probing skills</p> <p>c) Product Training – Specification, where, how and what is being hauled, loading/ unloading process (driver comfort safety MPG)</p>
		1 New Sales Process Workshop	
		2 Market Analysis	
		3 Prospecting	
		4 Commercial Excellence	Sales activity and booked revenue metrics reports.
		5 Sector Blitzing	
		<i>Account Management</i>	
		1 Customer Experience and Marketing	
		<i>Product and Value Knowledge</i>	
		1 Sell2Lease	
		2 Rate Sheet	
		3 Collateral	
		4 Vehicle Applications	
		5 Finance 101	
		6 Maintenance Vision	

<u>Foundational Value of Company (within 90 days of start)</u>	
<i>Sales Executives</i>	Discussion with key department leaders

	1 Sell2Lease	Product used to purchase customer-owned units and replace with full-service lease.
	2 Legal	
	3 Networking Event	
<i>Selling Skills</i>		
	1 New Sales Process	a) Refresher b) Nurturing
	2 Strategic Prospecting	
	3 Probing Questions	
	4 Value Tools	a) Facility tour b) Lease vs. Buy Analysis (net present value comparison) c) Industry specific processes and products
	5 Comparative Value Analysis (lease vs. buy)	Training needed is primarily around ownership costs. It is best to gather actual costs from the prospect, however they rarely have the total lifetime costs identified. Training provides guidelines for: a) purchase price and financing options for ownership; b) maintenance and operational expense, tax benefits of ownership and full-service lease; c) Re-sale value at end of term (ownership); d) time value of money; e) common leasing products; and, f) FASB considerations.
	6 Behavioral Styles	Identify behavioral styles of individual buyers. How varied behavioral styles receive and analyze information differently. How best to deliver information to the suspected style based on interactions Reps have had with them to date.
<i>Account Management</i>		
	1 Customer Review	

	2	Account Strategy	
	3	Fleet Services	
	<i>Product and Value Knowledge</i>		
	1	Proposal and Capabilities	Develop and build presentations targeted to specific account needs. Needs assessment meetings, facility tours and observations leading to targeted proposals.
	2	On-site Workout	
	3	Inside Sales: List Development	

<u>Advanced Sales Training (Within 18 months to 2 years of start)</u>			
	<i>Selling Skills</i>		
	1	Financial Fitness	Training to ensure salesperson is comfortable with necessary financial knowledge .
	2	Presentation Skills	
	3	New Sales Process Refresher	
	<i>Case Study</i>		
	1	Operational Fact-finding Meeting	
	2	Capabilities Presentation	
	3	Financial Fact-finding Meeting	
	4	Proposal to GM and CFO	