

The Influence of Critical Success Factors on B2B Sales Performance and the Mediating Role of Social Intelligence

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Abstract

In this study; the characteristics of sales representatives related to their sales performance such as learning orientation, customer orientation, intrinsic motivation, hardworking and technical expertise were defined as “Critical Success Factors in Selling” and the mediating role of social intelligence between these and sales performance were investigated. Data

collected from 376 sales representatives from 125 different companies showed that social intelligence has strong influence over sales performance and plays a mediating role between critical success factors in selling and sales performance.

Keywords: Social Intelligence, Sales Performance, Learning Orientation, Customer Orientation, Intrinsic Motivation

1. Introduction

The relational perspective in sales and marketing started with the development of business-to-business marketing (Ribeiro et al., 2015). Salespeople are vital for forming business value as they are in a position to understand the customer's value drivers, communicate products' value propositions, and provide customer insights to their own business firms (Blocker et al., 2012; Hohenschwert & Geiger, 2015). The conceptualization of value creation in business relations requires the establishment of interaction processes in which relationship value is created (Corsaro & Snehota, 2010; Grönroos, 2010). With this in mind business-to-business (B2B) firms invest millions of dollars annually to establish and operate better sales force systems and technologies that enhance productivity, communications, and customer relationships (Rodriguez & Honeycutt, 2011).

The traditional understanding of sales function meant that sales people primarily had to just stimulate demand by persuading customers to buy products and services of the firm. Hence, the primary focus of the sales function used to be conceived as to make sales and contribute to the firm's short-term results by using selling techniques, such as hard selling (Chu et al., 1995; Albers et al., 2015).

However, the modern and marketing oriented view of sales emphasizes the problem solving role of the sales activity. In this role the sales function relates both to the needs of the customer and the business firm, and matches available product and service offerings to the customer's needs (Yu et al., 2015). The problem-solving role of sales rests on the assumption that salespeople have the knowledge of appropriate solutions to customers' problems. Sales staff play a crucial role for value creation in B2B relationships through day-to-day interactions with customers (Hohenschwert & Geiger, 2015). The relational perspective of value developed over the past years in B2B marketing literature emphasizes an even greater role for salespeople in terms of influencing buyers' perceptions of value through interactions (Haas et al., 2012).

Additionally, the investigation of the factors influencing sales performance is also important as running sales departments are getting increasingly highly costlier (Sujan et al., 1988; Sabnis et al., 2013; Zampetakis, 2014). In addition to the salaries of sales, a variety of costs such as travelling and accommodation necessitate the recruitment and maintenance of only high performing sales staff (Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2007).

For this reason management researchers have concentrated their efforts over the years on studying the factors which influence salesperson performance (Churchill et al., 1985; Evans et al., 2012; Terho et al., 2015). Various studies have been carried out to assess a number of variables that relate to sales representatives' physical characteristics such as height, attractiveness, weight and age; personality characteristics such as gregariousness, extroversion/introversion, self/other orientation; and other miscellaneous characteristics such as intelligence, similarity to buyers, level of education etc. (Rozell et al., 2006; Alhouthi et al., 2014). In general, researchers tend to agree that role perception, aptitude, skill level and

motivation level are some of the most important determinants of salesperson performance (Churchill et al., 1985).

Previous studies confirmed that sales representatives' learning orientation (Sujan et al., 1994; Silver et al., 2006), customer orientation (Franke & Park, 2006; Schwepker & Good, 2012), intrinsic motivation (Oliver & Anderson, 1994; Bodla & Naeem, 2014), hard-working (Brown & Peterson, 1994; Silver et al., 2006), and technical expertise (Plank & Reid, 2010; Verbeke et al., 2010) appear to have positive influence on sales performance. Hence these may be considered as input factors for sales performance and called "the critical success factors in selling".

A review of sales performance literature also shows that the social intelligence construct has been somehow ignored. Instead, similar constructs like emotional intelligence (Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2003; Rozell et al., 2006), interpersonal skills (Rentz et al., 2002), and empathy (Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Plank & Reid, 2010; Agnihotri & Krush, 2015) have been quite often investigated from the perspective of sales performance.

Based on the above this study aims to explore the influence of learning orientation, customer orientation, intrinsic motivation, hardworking and technical expertise as critical success factors in selling and the mediating role of social intelligence on sales performance. Below in the literature review section why each of the variables has been included are explained.

2. Introduction

2.1 Social Intelligence

As mentioned briefly above a review of the sales performance literature shows that social intelligence construct has been largely ignored. Studies examining sales professionals' behaviors in relation to managing customers suggest that relationship management can be a significant factor in determining sales performance (Anderson & Oliver, 1987; Cravens et al., 1993; Hunter & Perreault, 2007). As most markets are increasingly becoming more competitive and customers are becoming more sophisticated and demanding and less loyal, the role of salespeople has become more important in terms of developing good customer relationships. Salespeople play a key role not only in terms of customer relationship management but also in terms of understanding, creating, communicating and delivering value to customers, which in turn are expected to increase the overall sales performance of the firm (Paparoidamis & Guenzi, 2009).

According to Silvera et al. (2001) who also developed The Tromso Social Intelligence Scale, there are three dimension of social intelligence. These are:

- i. **Social Processing:** Understanding others' feelings and thoughts in human relations and reading both verbal and behavioral messages.
- ii. **Social Skills:** The level of success of a person in human relations. In other words, one's ability to get along with others, join in different social activities and adapt to different

conditions.

iii. Social Awareness: Behaving in accordance with conditions, time and place, and responding properly to others behaviors.

Social intelligence differs from emotional intelligence in so much as it focuses on the impact that an individual has on others. Hence, social intelligence is rather relevant for sales performance. If one has high social intelligence then it is implied that s/he has high emotional intelligence as well, but not necessarily vice versa. During a typical working day sales representatives contact customers, suppliers, and colleagues from various functions of business. Thus social intelligence is crucial for sales representatives in terms of expressing themselves, persuading others, and achieving the desired outcomes during the interactions they engage (Riggio & Lee, 2007). Social intelligence is often confused with the concept of emotional intelligence. Goleman (2006) suggests that social intelligence differentiates from emotional intelligence as it involves creating successful interactions in addition to understanding others.

Similarly Wawra (2009) stated that emotional intelligence is a prerequisite for social intelligence. Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka (2003) argue that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in the success of sales representatives. Similarly, Rozell et al. (2006) supported this view. It's believed that sales representatives who have high emotional intelligence are also good at establishing interpersonal communications with customers. The establishment of interpersonal skills and social relationships are believed to lead to positive sales outcomes (Chakrabarty et al., 2014b). Moreover, by increasing adaptive selling behavior emotional intelligence influences the sales performance positively. Giacobbe et al. (2006) found that empathy during sales interactions helped sales representatives to establish and show adaptive behaviors during sales interactions. Rapport building is also crucial for sales representatives (Spiro and Weitz, 1990). According to Chakrabarty et al. (2014a) together with understanding non-verbal cues, rapport building contributes significantly to sales performance. Rentz et al. (2002) suggested that interpersonal skills are highly needed for effectiveness in sales as these skills enable sales representatives to build successful relations. Similarly, Castleberry and Shepherd (1993) and Comer (1999) stated that active listening skills are also important for each individual sales task. Based on the above the following hypotheses have been developed:

H_{1a}: There is a positive relation between social processing dimension of sales representatives' social intelligence and their sales performance.

H_{1b}: There is a positive relation between social skills dimension of sales representatives' social intelligence and their sales performance.

H_{1c}: There is a positive relation between social awareness dimension of sales representatives' social intelligence and their sales performance.

2.2 Learning Orientation

Marketing scholars have suggested that learning is central to creation of sustainable competitive advantage and enhancing business performance in today's fast changing and competitive marketplace (Chonko et al., 2003; Koc, 2009; Bell et al., 2010; Park et al., 2007). As many positive outcomes of learning generally accrue in the medium to long run, as opposed to the short run, many businesses may approach training and learning activities rather cautiously (Zhou et al., 2015). In particular, sales managers tend to concentrate on short term objectives and try to get out as much as possible from their sales staff in the short-run (Sujan et al., 1994; Wang & Netemeyer, 2002).

Learning orientation of sales staff can show how much effort they are willingly prepared to exert for developing themselves to gain new information and update their skills (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Vande Walle et al., 1999; Wang & Netemeyer, 2002; Evans et al., 2012). Learning oriented sales representatives tend to have an intrinsic desire to become better in their roles and usually are eager for taking challenging tasks and choosing unusual methods that provide them opportunities for new experiences (Sujan et al., 1994). Learning oriented sales people also see failures as learning opportunities. They tend adapt to changes more quickly, be not afraid of failures and do not easily give up when they encounter failures (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Ahearne et al., 2010).

Sales staff with learning orientation are more likely to try and find more effective and more efficient ways of executing regular tasks. As a consequence, sales staff with learning orientation become more satisfied with their jobs in the long run (Sujan et al., 1994). In order to establish organization-wide learning businesses are required to create a climate for personal learning (Sinkula et al., 1997; Calantone et al., 2002; Boyer et al., 2014). Creating a climate of organizational and personal learning is expected to support sustainable competitive advantage (Kohli et al., 1998; McFarland, 2003; Wei et al., 2013).

In a number of studies a positive correlation between learning orientation and sales performance were found (Sujan et al., 1994; Silver et al., 2006). However, yet in some others no significant relationship was found (Kohli et al., 1998; VandeWalle et al., 1999). Wang and Netemeyer (2002) argued that if learning oriented sales representatives given autonomy they may produce excellent results. Based on the above, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H₂: There is a positive relation between learning orientation of sales representatives and their sales performance.

2.3 Customer Orientation

Contrary to product orientation, customer orientation requires all the activities of a business to be geared towards customers' needs and expectations (Strong & Harris, 2004). In a customer oriented firm employees are continuously expected to collect information about the target market and translate this information into customer value (Slater & Narver, 1995; Koc, 2003). Consumer orientation enables the establishment of long term relationships with customers. Thus, customer oriented salespeople not only sell their products but also try to

build strong and sustainable relationships with their target customers (Schwepker, 2003). Furthermore, customer-oriented sales staff participate the new product development process actively and find final solutions to customers' problems (Schwepker & Good, 2012).

According to Saxe and Weitz (1982) customer oriented sales representatives are expected to (a) facilitate customers' purchase decisions which will meet their needs, (b) help their customers determine and assess their needs properly, (c) present products or services according to these needs, explain the facts of the products transparently, (d) avoid giving wrong or missing information and (e) avoid high-pressure sales situations.

A sales representative with customer orientation can assess her/his proposal from customers' perspective. Customer oriented sales people are able to judge whether promises made can be met by the business firm (Pettijohn et al., 2007). Customer oriented sales representatives are expected to explain the limitations and disadvantages of their products clearly to their customers. In so doing they can gain their customers' trust (Schwepker, 2003; Bateman & Valentine, 2015) and they can prevent dissatisfaction in the long term (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). According to Veiera et al. (2014) sales representative's performance is strengthened by simultaneous interrelated improvements in customer trust, satisfaction, and commitment.

It could be stated that customer orientation pays in the long run than in the short run (Joshi & Randall, 2001). For this reason businesses are advised to concentrate their efforts and finances on building customer orientation. Franke and Park's study (2006) found that customer orientation has a strong correlation with sales performance. Likewise, Wachner et al. (2009) and Schwepker and Good's (2012) studies also support this view. Based on the above the following hypothesis has been developed:

H₃: There is a positive relation between customer orientation of sales representatives and their sales performance.

2.4 Intrinsic Motivation

Motivation can be defined as a psychological state that initiates or directs behaviors towards a specific target by influencing an individual's cognitive choices (Brown & Peterson, 1994). Hence, motivation can be thought of as the level of employees' willingness to spend effort to achieve organizational targets (Latham & Ernst, 2006; Hartmann & Slapničar, 2012). Intrinsic motivation is the motivation that comes from employee's personal beliefs, targets and needs (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005; Chakrabarti et al., 2014a).

As the motivation construct can be instrumental in explaining the reasons behind why sales people behave differently in particular situations, sales managers have always been interested in understanding the concept of motivation (Walker et al., 1977; Churchill et al., 1985; Anderson & Oliver, 1987). Many studies show that motivated salesperson work harder and produce more outcomes (Sujan, 1986; Weitz et al., 1986; Miao & Evans, 2014). Based on the above the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H4: There is a positive relation between intrinsic motivation of sales representatives and their sales performance.

2.5 Hard-Working

Being hard-working is one of the prerequisites of sales profession (Sujan, 1986; Brown & Peterson, 1994; Vande Walle et al., 1999; Krishnan et al., 2002). Hard-working sales representatives are more likely put greater effort and spend more time in sales related tasks compared with others. When a hard-working sales representative encounters a problem, or a short term failure, s/he tends to work harder to achieve, rather than to give up (Sujan et al., 1994; Krishnan et al., 2002).

Hard-working sales representatives tend to use their time more efficiently and make more customer calls while others spend more with one customer and waste more of their time with personal matters. Studies in sales literature indicate the correlation of being hard-working sales representative and sales performance (Silver et al., 2006; Chakrabarti et al., 2014b). Sujan et al. (1994) suggest that hard-working sales representatives are more effective in repeat sale tasks. Based on the above following hypothesis has been developed:

H5: There is a positive relation between hard-working of sales representatives and their sales performance.

2.6 Technical Expertise

Technical expertise is about sales representatives' ability to use their knowledge and experience to reach ideal solutions (Sujan et al., 1988; Bradford et al., 2010; Ko & Dennis, 2013). Each member of the sales team is expected to have a sufficient level of knowledge of the products or services they offer to customers. Basic knowledge in terms of technical expertise may consist of information regarding the specifications of products or services, technical details for the proposed solutions and the processes regarding pre-sales or post-sales activities. In addition to these, all sales staff are normally expected to have sufficient knowledge of the potential target markets they serve, current market and customer trends and direct and indirect competitors (Sujan et al., 1988). Technical expertise allows sales representatives to find better and quicker solutions to customers' problems (Pettijohn et al., 2007). Additionally, technical expertise allows sales representatives to categorize their customers and find solutions accordingly (Weitz et al., 1986).

Sales representatives with technical expertise are more able to close sales (Sangtani & Murshed, 2013; Leigh et al., 2014). They also tend to have less stress in complex situations, operate better (Miao & Evans, 2012), and become more successful (Boyer et al., 2012). Verbeke et al. (2010) and suggested that there was a positive relationship between technical expertise and sales performance. Based on the above following hypothesis has been developed:

H6: There is a positive relation between technical expertise of sales representatives and their sales performance.

3. Sales Performance

While functions like production, accounting, R&D, supply chain etc. generally add to the costs of the firm, marketing and sales activities generate revenues. Sales performance can be defined as the quantitative contributions of sales representatives towards business targets (Behrman & Perreault, 1982; Piercy et al., 2007). Sales performance can also be defined in the form of increasing market share, reaching planned sales volumes, increasing sales revenues and selling high profit margin products (Babakus et al., 1996; Flaherty & Pappas, 2004). Regarding the mediational relations of social intelligence, the hypothesis below are proposed.

H7: Dimensions of social intelligence (social processing: H_{7a}, social skills: H_{7b}, social awareness: H_{7c}) mediates the relation of learning orientation and sales performance.

H8: Dimensions of social intelligence (social processing: H_{8a}, social skills: H_{8b}, social awareness: H_{8c}) mediates the relation of customer orientation and sales performance.

H9: Dimensions of social intelligence (social processing: H_{9a}, social skills: H_{9b}, social awareness: H_{9c}) mediates the relation of intrinsic motivation and sales performance.

H10: Dimension of social intelligence (social processing: H_{10a}, social skills: H_{10b}, social awareness: H_{10c}) mediates the relation of hard-working and sales performance.

H11: Dimension of social intelligence (social processing: H_{11a}, social skills: H_{11b}, social awareness: H_{11c}) mediates the relation of technical expertise and sales performance.

4. Method

The research was carried out with B2B sales representatives in Istanbul, Turkey. A survey has been prepared and sent out to B2B sales representatives determined on convenience sampling. A total of 376 surveys were collected from B2B sales representatives working in 125 different companies.

Of the participants 80.6 % of them were male and 19.4 % were female. In terms of the level of education of the participants 69.7 % of the participants had bachelor's degrees, 15.7 % have master's degrees and 14.6% graduates of high schools or technical schools. Of the sales representatives 39.6 % were between the ages of 26 and 32, 35.9 % were between 33 and 39, 18.9 % were older than 40 and 3.7 % were below the age of 25. In terms of years' of experience 30.3% of the participants had 5 to 9 years', 23.1 % had 10 to 14 years', and 18.6 % had 15 to 19 years' experience. Of the participants 17.3% had less than 4 years' and 10.6 had more than 20 years' experience.

4.1 Measuring Validation

Constructs were measured with five-point Likert scales which were found to be valid and reliable in previous studies. For measuring social intelligence "The Tromso Social Intelligence Scale" by Silvera et al. (2001) was used. Sales performance was measured with

the seven items taken from Sujan et al. (1994). Learning orientation scale was also adopted from Sujan et al. (1994). For measuring customer orientation five items from Saxe and Weitz (1982) were used. The intrinsic motivation of the sales people were measured with three items developed by Anderson and Oliver (1987). Hard-working scale consists three items which were taken from Sujan et al. (1994). Finally for technical expertise six items were taken from Rentz et al. (2002).

In order to check the validity and the reliability, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted. Partial least squares regression (PLS) method, which is reported to give adequate results even in small samples (Chin, 1998) was chosen. The SmartPLS 3 software was used (Ringle et al., 2015). Even though PLS method does not have a minimum limit for sampling it is advised to have at least ten times of the maximum items that belong to a construct (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2011). In the study, the largest scale was social intelligence with 21 items. As the sample size was larger than ten times of twenty one this condition was met ($N=376 > 21 * 10$). PLS algorithm was executed and factor loadings were checked. Items that had low factor loadings were omitted (Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2014). Finally, as seen in Appendix A all factor loadings were over 0.60. In order to test the statistical significance of confirmatory factor analysis bootstrap procedure was held with 1000 samples (Hair et al., 2014). Results indicated that all items were statistically significant ($t > 2.57$, $p < 0.01$). Convergent validity and discriminant validity were met by following the directives of Hair et al. (2014) according to Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. Composite reliability (CR) of all structures was over 0.70. The Cronbach's Alpha values were also over 0.70. These results can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Factor correlations

	Factor	Me an	SD	CR	Cr. α	AV E	\sqrt{AVE}	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Customer Orientation	4.1 00	0.5 57	0.8 36	0.7 40	0.5 62	0.7 50	1.0 00								
2	Technical Expertise	3.7 57	0.6 43	0.8 62	0.8 05	0.5 57	0.7 46	0.2 93	1.0 00							
3	Intrinsic Motivation	4.2 60	0.6 13	0.8 85	0.8 05	0.7 21	0.8 49	0.5 42	0.2 49	1.0 00						
4	Learning Orientation	4.2 97	0.5 72	0.8 77	0.8 27	0.5 88	0.7 67	0.4 29	0.2 59	0.5 63	1.0 00					
5	Sales Performance	4.1 72	0.5 98	0.8 94	0.8 62	0.5 49	0.7 41	0.4 75	0.2 41	0.5 90	0.4 79	1.0 00				
6	Social Processing	3.9 66	0.5 24	0.9 04	0.8 77	0.5 75	0.7 58	0.4 84	0.3 68	0.5 19	0.4 07	0.5 25	1.0 00			
7	Social Skills	4.1 12	0.6 11	0.9 27	0.9 07	0.6 44	0.8 02	0.5 20	0.3 84	0.5 93	0.5 04	0.5 80	0.6 34	1.0 00		
8	Social Awareness	4.2 63	0.5 89	0.9 24	0.9 04	0.6 36	0.7 97	0.5 94	0.3 24	0.6 07	0.3 71	0.6 06	0.5 92	0.5 71	1.0 00	
9	Hard-working	4.1 78	0.6 57	0.8 85	0.8 06	0.7 21	0.8 49	0.5 43	0.2 48	0.5 68	0.5 19	0.5 42	0.4 51	0.5 25	0.5 75	1.0 00

N=376, SD: Standard Deviation, CR: Composite Reliability, Cr. α : Cronbach's Alpha, AVE: Average Variance Extracted
Correlations are significant at 0.01 level.

5. Method

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the hypotheses of the study. First, a regression model was built by taking the direct influences of all constructs on sales performance. Next, mediational regression analysis was carried out to test the mediating effects of social intelligence.

Regression results, stated in Table 2, showed that social processing ($\beta=0.113$; $p<0.05$), social skills ($\beta=0.187$; $p<0.01$), social awareness ($\beta=0.256$; $p<0.01$), learning orientation ($\beta=0.132$; $p<0.01$), intrinsic motivation ($\beta=0.149$; $p<0.01$) and hard-working ($\beta=0.094$; $p<0.10$) had significant influence on sales performance. On the other hand customer orientation ($\beta=-0.014$, $p>0.05$) and technical expertise ($\beta=-0.045$; $p>0.05$) were found to have insignificant influence on sales performance ($F=45.416$, $p<0.001$).

Table 2. Regression analysis

Dependent Variable: Sales Performance		
Independent Variable	β	p
Social Processing	0.113	0.030
Social Skills	0.187	0.001
Social Awareness	0.256	0.000
Learning Orientation	0.132	0.005
Customer Orientation	-0.014	0.784
Intrinsic Motivation	0.149	0.006
Hard-working	0.094	0.064
Technical Expertise	-0.045	0.270
R	0.705	0.000
R ²	0.497	
F	45.416	

According to the analysis H_{1a} , H_{1b} , H_{1c} , H_2 , H_4 and H_5 were accepted but H_3 and H_6 were rejected. Mediating variables enter between independent and dependent variables and either decrease or exterminate the effect of independent variable (Baron and Kenny, 1986). To test the mediating effects PROCESS macro, developed by Hayes (2012) was used. According to mediational regression analysis, dimensions of social intelligence were found to take mediating roles between the critical success factors in selling and sales performance. Results can be seen in Table 3 to Table 7.

Table 3. Learning Orientation and Sales Performance: Mediating of Social Intelligence

Model	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R	R ²	F	p	β	t	p
	Learning Orientation	Sales Performance	0.466	0.217	103.931	0.000	0.466	10.195	0.000
H_{7a}	Learning Orientation	Social Processing	0.357	0.127	54.598	0.000	0.357	7.389	0.000
	Social Processing	Sales Performance	0.599	0.358	104.184	0.000	0.402	9.052	0.000
	Learning Orientation						0.323	7.272	0.000
			Indirect Effect				0.143		
H_{7b}	Learning Orientation	Social Skills	0.489	0.239	117.607	0.000	0.489	10.845	0.000
	Social Skills	Sales Performance	0.614	0.377	112.816	0.000	0.458	9.770	0.000
	Learning Orientation						0.242	5.173	0.000
			Indirect Effect				0.224		

<i>H_{7c}</i>	Learning Orientation	Social Awareness	0.358	0.128	54.870	0.000	0.358	7.407	0.000
	Social Awareness	Sales Performance	0.654	0.428	139.494	0.000	0.491	11.714	0.000
	Learning Orientation						0.291	6.930	0.000
	Indirect Effect							0.175	
β: Standardized beta; se: Standard error; p: Significance									

Table 4. Customer Orientation and Sales Performance: Mediating of Social Intelligence

Model	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R	R ²	F	p	β	t	p
	Customer Orientation	Sales Performance	0.446	0.199	92.922	0.000	0.446	9.640	0.000
<i>H_{8a}</i>	Customer Orientation	Social Processing	0.464	0.215	102.696	0.000	0.464	10.134	0.000
	Social Processing	Sales Performance	0.567	0.322	88.398	0.000	0.395	8.209	0.000
	Customer Orientation						0.263	5.455	0.000
	Indirect Effect							0.183	
<i>H_{8b}</i>	Customer Orientation	Social Skills	0.497	0.247	122.977	0.000	0.497	11.090	0.000
	Social Skills	Sales Performance	0.605	0.366	107.649	0.000	0.471	9.911	0.000
	Customer Orientation						0.212	4.456	0.000
	Indirect Effect							0.234	
<i>H_{8c}</i>	Customer Orientation	Social Awareness	0.580	0.336	189.191	0.000	0.580	13.755	0.000
	Social Awareness	Sales Performance	0.608	0.370	109.370	0.000	0.507	10.049	0.000
	Customer Orientation						0.152	3.019	0.003
	Indirect Effect								
β: Standardized beta; se: Standard error; p: Significance									

Table 5. Intrinsic Motivation and Sales Performance: Mediating of Social Intelligence

Model	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R	R ²	F	p	β	t	p
	Intrinsic Motivation	Sales Performance	0.574	0.330	184.070	0.000	0.574	13.567	0.000
<i>H_{9a}</i>	Intrinsic Motivation	Social Processing	0.506	0.256	128.628	0.000	0.506	11.341	0.000
	Social Processing	Sales Performance	0.632	0.399	123.738	0.000	0.305	6.544	0.000
	Intrinsic Motivation						0.420	9.030	0.000
	Indirect Effect							0.154	
<i>H_{9b}</i>	Intrinsic Motivation	Social Skills	0.585	0.342	194.237	0.000	0.585	13.937	0.000
	Social Skills	Sales Performance	0.646	0.418	133.829	0.000	0.366	7.507	0.000
	Intrinsic Motivation						0.361	7.404	0.000
	Indirect Effect							0.213	
<i>H_{9c}</i>	Intrinsic Motivation	Social Awareness	0.601	0.361	211.411	0.000	0.601	14.540	0.000
	Social Awareness	Sales Performance	0.654	0.428	139.385	0.000	0.391	7.987	0.000
	Intrinsic Motivation						0.339	6.919	0.000
	Indirect Effect							0.235	
β: Standardized beta; se: Standard error; p: Significance									

Table 6. Hard-working and Sales Performance: Mediating of Social Intelligence

Model	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R	R ²	F	p	β	t	p
	Hard-working	Sales Performance	0.509	0.259	130.826	0.000	0.509	11.438	0.000
<i>H_{10a}</i>	Hard-working	Social Processing	0.405	0.164	73.532	0.000	0.405	8.575	0.000
	Social Processing	Sales Performance	0.612	0.375	111.774	0.000	0.372	8.304	0.000
	Hard-working						0.358	8.001	0.000
	Indirect Effect							0.151	
<i>H_{10b}</i>	Hard-working	Social Skills	0.498	0.248	123.399	0.000	0.498	11.109	0.000
	Social Skills	Sales Performance	0.631	0.398	123.170	0.000	0.429	9.365	0.000
	Hard-working						0.295	6.371	0.000
	Indirect Effect							0.214	
<i>H_{10c}</i>	Hard-working	Social Awareness	0.564	0.318	174.597	0.000	0.564	13.214	0.000

	Social Awareness	Sales Performance	0.631	0.398	123.457	0.452	0.452	9.288	0.000
	Hard-working						0.254	5.226	0.000
	Indirect Effect							0.255	

β: Standardized beta; se: Standard error; p: Significance

Table 7. Technical Expertise and Sales Performance: Mediating of Social Intelligence

Model	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R	R ²	F	p	β	t	p
	Technical Expertise	Sales Performance	0.218	0.048	18.713	0.000	0.218	4.326	0.000
<i>H_{11a}</i>	Technical Expertise	Social Processing	0.361	0.131	56.201	0.000	0.361	7.497	0.000
	Social Processing	Sales Performance	0.518	0.269	68.480	0.000	0.504	10.614	0.000
	Technical Expertise						0.036	0.760	0.448
	Indirect Effect							0.182	
<i>H_{11b}</i>	Technical Expertise	Social Skills	0.363	0.132	56.721	0.000	0.363	7.531	0.000
	Social Skills	Sales Performance	0.576	0.332	92.819	0.000	0.573	12.610	0.000
	Technical Expertise						0.011	0.232	0.817
	Indirect Effect							0.207	
<i>H_{11c}</i>	Technical Expertise	Social Awareness	0.306	0.094	38.661	0.000	0.306	6.218	0.000
	Social Awareness	Sales Performance	0.596	0.356	102.958	0.000	0.583	13.354	0.000
	Technical Expertise						0.040	0.913	0.362
	Indirect Effect							0.178	

β: Standardized beta; se: Standard error; p: Significance

Analyses revealed that dimensions of social intelligence play mediating role between critical success factors in selling and sales performance. Hence, all hypotheses regarding mediation *H₇*, *H₈*, *H₉*, *H₁₀*, and *H₁₁* were accepted.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

According to regression analysis learning orientation of sales representatives were found to have a positive effect on sales performance ($\beta=0.132$, $p<0.01$). This result is in line with previous studies in sales literature (Sujan et al., 1994; Silver et al., 2006). It is important for sales representatives to have knowledge of the products they sell, competitors in the market, characteristics of the targeted customer groups and alternative offers available. Based on this outcome human resources departments of B2B firms may be recommended to measure job applicants' learning orientation levels before making recruitment decisions for sales representative positions. When measuring job applicants' learning orientation interviewing techniques may also be used in addition to standard tests.

One other finding of the study was that the intrinsic motivation of sales representatives influenced their sales performance positively ($\beta=0.149$, $p<0.01$). This result is in line with the findings of Weitz et al. (1986), Spiro and Weitz (1990), Oliver and Anderson (1994), and Bodla and Naeem (2014). Based on this finding managers in B2B businesses are recommended to establish a working climate which enables their sales representatives to develop beliefs that their jobs and work outcomes are important. It would be hard to develop a successful career for a sales representative unless s/he enjoys her/his job and is satisfied with her/his job. Those individuals who choose sales careers just because they view sales positions as opportunities to have access to attractive perks or benefits such as company car and various incentives may probably end up getting disappointed and may eventually leave

their jobs. As sales profession requires a high level effort in terms of travelling, struggling with weather conditions, meeting new people and new challenges every day, intrinsic motivation is highly needed. For this reason an overconcentration on candidates' education, foreign language skills at the expense of their intrinsic motivation during recruitment may lead to hiring of inappropriate candidates for the job.

As expected hard-working was found to be positively related to sales performance ($\beta=0.094$, $p<0.10$). This outcome is similar to the findings of previous studies (Brown & Peterson, 1994; Vande Walle et al., 1999; Silver et al., 2006; Chakrabarti et al., 2014b). Additionally, although results of the analyses indicate that customer orientation has a high level of correlation with sales performance ($r=0.475$, $p<0.01$), it tends to lose its significance in terms of its direct effects ($\beta=-0.014$, $p>0.10$) during the presence of other factors. While many previous studies found positive relations between customer orientation and sales performance (Franke & Park, 2006; Wachner et al., 2009; Schwepker & Good, 2012) some others (Johnson et al., 2009; Homburg, 2011) did not. Goad and Jaramillo (2014) stated that the influence of customer orientation depends on the type of the customer. The results of this study also suggests that marketing orientation is crucial for sales representatives, but its main importance lies in the long term retention of customers.

Findings regarding technical expertise variable showed similarities with customer orientation of sales representatives. Technical expertise of sales representatives was found to have insignificant effect ($\beta=-0.045$, $p>0.10$) in regression analysis. Sales literature in general argues that technical expertise has a positive relationship with sales performance (Plank & Reid, 2010; Verbeke et al., 2010; Sangtani & Murshed, 2013). In opposite vein, Ahmad et al. (2010:181-211) expressed that sales representatives who had higher technical expertise could face problems in terms of communicating benefits and value to the customer. Based on the findings of this study and the literature it may be suggested that technical expertise should be supported with other sales characteristics.

Finally, the study found that social intelligence of sales representatives influenced the sales performances of sales representatives directly. As suggested, significant relationships were found between social processing ($\beta=0.113$, $p<0.05$), social skills ($\beta=0.187$, $p<0.01$) and social awareness ($\beta=0.256$, $p<0.01$) and sales performance. Additionally, the influence of social intelligence appears to be highly dominant that it mediates the relation between critical success factors in selling and sales performance.

Above results support the view that social intelligence is very important for sales representatives in B2B businesses. B2B firms should try to ensure the recruitment and maintenance sales staff who have high social intelligence. It is important to invest time and money on developing social intelligence of staff to ensure a constant pool of staff with social intelligence. Through continuous assessments, gaps and training needs may be regularly identified and appropriate training sessions could be developed.

Sales representatives in industrial markets are expected to act like consultants for their

customers. For this to happen, first they need to listen to their customers actively. Sales representatives are expected to ask questions and inquire their customers' needs, wants and problems. Sales representatives are recommended not only focus on verbal explanations and cues. They are recommended to develop skills in understanding non-verbal cues which may communicate significant messages. Sales representatives are also required to handle customer objections skillfully. Rather than a using continuous defensive approach or making excuses, sales representatives are recommended to have the type of attitude which is instrumental in solving their customers' problems and adding value. A defensive approach can frustrate customers.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Factor Loadings

	Scale	Factor Loadings
	Sales Performance	
1	Contributing to your company's acquiring a good market share.	0.692
2	Selling high profit margin products.	0.739
3	Generating a high level of dollar sales.	0.789
4	Quickly generating sales of new company products.	0.799
5	Identifying major accounts in your territory and selling them.	0.762
6	Exceeding sales targets.	0.614
7	Assisting your sales supervisor to meet his or her goals.	0.773
	Learning Orientation	
1	An important part of being a good salesperson is continually improving your sales skills	0.797
2	It is important for me to learn from each selling experience I have	0.809
5	It is worth spending a great deal of time learning new approaches for dealing with customers	0.721
6	Learning how to be a better salesperson is of fundamental importance to me	0.790
7	I put in a great deal of effort sometimes to learn something new	0.710
	Customer Orientation	
2	I always present the customer with a realistic picture of what my firm's products can do.	0.794
3	I spend much of my time listening to the customer talk about his/her firm's needs.	0.704

4	I wait until I fully understand the customer's needs before making my sales presentation.	0.822
5	I am always candid in discussions with my customers.	0.666
	Intrinsic Motivation	
2	I sell because of the feeling of performing a useful service	0.814
3	I obtain a sense of accomplishment from my work	0.905
4	I feel a sense of personal growth and development in my work	0.825
	Hard-working	
1	I work long hours to meet my sales objectives.	0.725
2	I do not give up easily when I encounter a customer who is difficult to sell.	0.903
3	I work untiringly at selling a customer until I get an order.	0.906
	Technical Expertise	
2	I have knowledge of my company's procedures.	0.833
3	I have knowledge of our competitors' products, services, and sales policies.	0.817
4	I have knowledge of our product line, including product features and benefits.	0.702
5	I have knowledge of my customers' operations	0.709
6	I have imagination in supplying products and services that meet my customers' needs.	0.654

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Factor Loadings

Social Intelligence Scale		Factor Loadings		
		F1	F2	F3
1	I can predict other peoples' behavior.	0.707	0.421	0.380
2	I know how my actions will make others feel.	0.783	0.478	0.470
6	I understand other peoples' feelings.	0.776	0.553	0.430
9	I understand others' wishes.	0.776	0.553	0.511
14	I can often understand what others are trying to accomplish without the need for them to say anything.	0.716	0.342	0.442
17	I can predict how others will react to my behavior.	0.753	0.411	0.426
19	I can often understand what others really mean through their expression, body language, etc.	0.794	0.568	0.475
4	I often feel uncertain around new people who I don't know.	0.524	0.799	0.410
7	I fit in easily in social situations.	0.514	0.851	0.481
10	I am good at entering new situations and meeting people for the first time.	0.497	0.848	0.484
12	I have a hard time getting along with other people.	0.465	0.751	0.405
15	It takes a long time for me to get to know others well.	0.532	0.807	0.418
18	I am good at getting on good terms with new people.	0.553	0.800	0.533
20	I frequently have problems finding good conversation topics.	0.470	0.756	0.465
3	I often feel that it is difficult to understand others' choices.	0.532	0.467	0.850
5	People often surprise me with the things they do.	0.470	0.538	0.805
8	Other people become angry with me without me being able to explain why.	0.344	0.421	0.691
11	It seems as though people are often angry or irritated with me when I say what I think.	0.424	0.375	0.791
13	I find people unpredictable.	0.497	0.457	0.838
16	I have often hurt others without realizing it.	0.483	0.450	0.745
21	I am often surprised by others' reactions to what I do.	0.533	0.469	0.850
F1: Social Processing Dimension, F2: Social Skills Dimension, F3: Social Awareness Dimension				

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