

MASTERY-AVOIDANCE AND SALESPERSON COMPETENCE MOTIVATION: AN EXPLANATION OF PLATEAUIING

Lawrence Silver, Southeastern Oklahoma State University
Courtney R. Kernek, Southeastern Oklahoma State University

ABSTRACT

This study revisits the concepts of achievement motivation and goal orientation in light of recent substantive changes including the use of the concept competence motivation in lieu of achievement motivation and the addition of a mastery-avoidance construct to the mastery and performance goal orientation model. The addition of the mastery-avoidance construct may explain some competence and performance outcomes that have not previously been understood. Guided by formative studies in achievement motivation theory and goal orientation, this paper highlights a gap in current research and examines the re-conceptualization of the sales literature by addressing competence rather than achievement and proposes a model of salesperson competence that attempts to explain salesperson plateauing. The conclusions suggest that competence motivation can be defined more precisely than achievement motivation, allowing for a clearer set of parameters that move toward better theoretical models and operation of constructs.

Keywords: achievement motivation, competence motivation, goal orientation, mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance

INTRODUCTION

Achievement motivation theory has been an important element in attempting to predict performance in a variety of competence settings such as classrooms (Ames 1992; Ames & Archer 1988; Dweck & Leggett 1988), athletics (Sari, 2015; Schneider, Harrington & Tobar 2017) leadership (Butler, 2007; Hendricks & Payne 2007; Jansen & Van Yperen 2004), and in various aspects of business including sales (Brown, Cron & Slocum, 1997; Kohli, Shervani & Challagalla, 1998; Novell, Machleit & Sojka, 2016; Silver, Dwyer & Alford, 2006; Sujan, Weitz & Kumar, 1994; VandeWalle, Brown, Cron & Slocum 1999). Achievement motivation theory posits that the goal orientation a person adopts prior to engaging in an achievement task determines the mental framework of how that person will interpret, evaluate, and act in pursuing the achievement goal. Thus, the goal orientation the person adopts motivates behavior in that particular achievement setting (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). An achievement setting may be defined as any setting that requires a demonstration of competence (Dweck & Bempechat, 1983; Nicholls, 1984). Examples of achievement goal situations include classrooms, athletics, leadership, business, and, pertinent to this paper, sales performance.

Much of the above referenced research focused on two distinct goal orientations – mastery (learning goal) orientation and performance goal orientation. Particularly in the area of sales, the focus has been on two aspects of goal orientation (e.g., Novell, Machleit & Sojka, 2017); one study bifurcated the performance goal orientation into a performance approach orientation and a performance avoid orientation (Silver, et al., 2006). This study found that both

mastery and performance goal orientations were positively associated with salesperson performance while a performance-avoid goal orientation was negatively associated with performance. Novell, et al. (2016) treated goal orientation (learning and performance only) as a mid-level construct between implicit personality or lay theories and salesperson behavior patterns.

As valuable as these studies are, the concept of achievement motivation has undergone substantive changes in the past few years including the use of the concept *competence* motivation in lieu of *achievement* motivation (Elliot & Dweck, 2005) and the addition of a mastery-avoidance construct to the mastery and performance goal orientation model (Elliot, 2005; Elliot & McGregor 2001). The conceptual reasons for competence in lieu of motivation aid in a broader application of the theory in terms of culture and lifespan. The addition of the mastery-avoidance construct may explain some competence and performance outcomes that have not previously been understood.

There is some debate in the goal orientation literature as to whether goal orientation is a stable dispositional trait of an individual or a more of state, that is, specific to the task at hand. Researchers have characterized goal orientation as a dispositional trait (e.g., Fisher & Ford, 1998; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997) and as a more dynamic state in response to situational influences (e.g., Dweck & Leggett, 1998; Button, Mathieu & Zajac, 1996).

In a meta-analysis of goal orientation research, Payne, Youngcourt, and Beaubien (2007), noted that goal orientation may be both a trait and a state. They describe state goal orientation as follows, "State goal orientation describes the goal one has for a given situation. It is conceptually similar to trait goal orientation as it represents one's goal preferences in an achievement situation, however, state goal orientation is specific to the task at hand" (p. 131).

Given this definition, Payne, et al. (2007) expected to find that trait goal orientation was more stable than state goal orientation. Yet, their research showed that the longer the time interval of the study, the weaker the coefficient of stability of trait goal orientation suggesting that possibly state and trait goal orientation are similar in stability.

Dragoni (2005) notes that early goal orientation research noted that leadership and environmental perceptions are possible antecedents to a particular goal orientation. Studies have shown that state goal orientation in students can be manipulated by teachers who expect and reward certain student behaviors (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Thus, Dragoni (2005) suggests that leaders (or sales managers) are able to influence employees' goal orientations by setting the psychological climate. This paper assumes Dragoni's (2005) assertion of goal orientation as a state, which can be influenced by sales managers.

The theory of life span control posits that throughout life adults tend to maximize gains and minimize losses. In order to do this, people adapt to changing physical, emotional, and cognitive states as well as changing contextual situations. This is often managed by modifying goals from growth oriented to maintenance oriented and/or loss prevention (Ebner, Freund & Baltes, 2006). Thus, we propose in this paper that the older, successful salesperson will shift from motivation of striving to achieve more sales to a motivation of striving to maintain or prevent the loss of current sales.

This issue is more important now than in the past. The 55+ age cohort is growing faster than any other and the 65+ cohort is the only group showing significant annual growth (Khabbaz & Perry, 2018). Many of these older people will stay in the workforce wither because they are financially unable to retire or because they enjoy working. Moreover, a large number of over age 50 workers are likely to be in sales (AARP, 2016). Thus while older workers contribute

emotional stability, nuanced thinking and institutional know-how to their employers (Irving, 2018), their motivation to set sales records and work long hours is in doubt.

Addressing these issues, this paper highlights a gap in current research and examines the re-conceptualization of the sales literature by addressing competence rather than achievement and proposes a model of salesperson competence that attempts to explain salesperson plateauing. The paper is organized as follows: First, there is an examination of the weaknesses of the concept of achievement motivation and how the term *competence* motivation answers these weaknesses. Next is an explanation of the evolution of goal orientation from a 1 X 1 to a 2 X 2 framework and the importance of the mastery-avoidance construct. Third, a set of research proposals are presented that replicate prior research and add the mastery-avoidance goal orientation. Finally, the conclusion offers a summary of main points and suggests directions for future research.

Goal Orientation

Key to the concept of achievement is valence. That is, a person may be motivated toward a demonstration of competence or away from a demonstration of incompetence (Eliot, 2005). This construct of valence most often used in research is the achievement goal orientation construct. In this section, a brief review of the essential elements of achievement goal orientation are presented.

The achievement goal construct was developed in the late 1970s by a group of researchers working both independently and together at the University of Illinois (Eliot, 2005). One of the seminal works to emerge from this research was the social-cognitive model of motivation proposed by Carol Dweck and Ellen Leggett (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Over a decade of work with school-age children had shown that children of equal ability responded differently to failure in an achievement setting. The research indicated that children adopted different goals in an achievement setting, and these different goals lead to different behavior patterns. Students who adopted a “learning” goal saw failure as feedback that was useful in mastering a task while students who adopted a “performance” goal had a response of helplessness in the face of future similar tasks. For example, a student with a learning goal would see failure on a math test as an indicator that the student needed to work harder to learn math. In contrast, a student with a performance goal would see failure as an indicator that they were not good at math and there was no use trying.

Dweck and Leggett (1988) concluded that goal orientation was a mid-level construct and was positioned between a student’s implicit theory of ability (a/k/a mindset) and the resultant behavior pattern. Thus, goal orientation, as the proximal construct, motivates behavior even if, in part, it is determined by the more distal construct of mindset (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Sujana, Weitz & Kumar, 1994).

Using the example of salespeople, a salesperson with a learning goal orientation is intrinsically motivated to complete difficult sales and is generally unconcerned about normative standards of performance or comparison with other salespeople. This salesperson is characterized by enjoying the acquisition of new skills, taking on challenging tasks, and demonstrating persistence and enhanced effort in the face of failure (Kohli, Shervani, & Challgalla, 1998; Silver, et al, 2006). On the other hand, a salesperson with a performance goal orientation is more interested in demonstrating competence in relation to other salespeople and lacks intrinsic motivation to complete a task. This salesperson believes that if one has ability, one does not need

to exert effort to achieve success (Ames & Archer, 1988; Nichols, 1984). Thus, failure equals a lack of ability, and the performance-goal oriented salesperson will avoid challenging tasks.

It is important to note that learning (or mastery) and performance goal orientations are independent constructs and are not necessarily on opposing ends of a continuum. Thus, a salesperson may be interested in mastering a task, while at the same time, working to outperform other salespeople (Button, Mathier, & Zajac, 1996). However, one goal orientation is usually dominant over the other in an achievement setting (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Kohli, Shervani, & Challagalla, 1998; Nicolls, 1984).

Several studies looked at the relationship between these two goal orientations and salesperson performance. Sujan, et al. (1994) found an indirect effect of mastery and performance goal orientation on salesperson performance while VandeWalle et al., (1999) found no direct or indirect effect of goal orientation on salesperson performance. Kohli, et al. (1998) found a direct effect of a performance goal orientation on salesperson performance, but failed to find any effect for a mastery goal orientation.

Bifurcation of the Performance Goal Orientation Construct

Although the concept of approach and avoidance in achievement motivation was first introduced by Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, and Sears (1944) it was generally ignored until the late 1990s (Elliot, 2005). Work by Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) and Elliot and Church (1997) found through factor analysis that there was a clear distinction between a performance-approach goal orientation and a performance-avoidance goal orientation. Elliot and Church (1997) found that, as expected, a mastery goal orientation was predictive of intrinsic motivation. A performance-approach goal focused on normative competence. In this case, students with a performance-approach goal did well on graded performance. Performance-avoidance was characterized by students who feared failure and saw negative feedback as a lack of ability.

Silver, et al. (2006) tested this trichotomous achievement goal framework in a national survey of life insurance salespeople. The findings of that study supported the approach and avoidance constructs and found a positive relationship between a mastery goal orientation and salesperson performance; a performance-approach goal orientation and salesperson performance; and a negative relationship between a performance-avoidance goal orientation and salesperson performance.

Bifurcation of the Mastery Goal Construct

Continuing his work on goal orientation, Elliot (1999) proposed a 2 X 2 model of achievement motivation: mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance. Mastery-approach goals were the same as mastery goals. That is, someone who holds a mastery-approach goal is intrinsically motivated to develop skills and abilities and master a task. In contrast, mastery-avoidance is characterized by striving to avoid any appearance of losing one's skills, forgetting what they have learned and mastered, or demonstrating task- or self-referential incompetence. Elliot (2005) explains that mastery-avoidance goals are "characterized as mastery goals because of their focus on development and task mastery; they were characterized as avoidance goals because of their focus on a potential negative outcome (self- or task-referential incompetence)" (p. 61). Mastery-avoidance goals were hypothesized to produce less optimal results than mastery-approach goals but more than performance-avoidance goals. To date, no studies of salesperson performance has used the 2 X 2 framework.

From Achievement to Competence

Despite numerous studies of achievement motivation across a broad array of disciplines, some weaknesses in the achievement motivation literature have been identified by two of the pioneer researchers in the field, Carol Dweck and Andrew Elliot (Elliot & Dweck, 2005). The weaknesses are discussed below:

First, there is a lack of a clear set of structural parameters in the concept of “achievement” (Elliot & Dweck, 2005). The authors note that if there is not a clear set of parameters for achievement, it is difficult to know what should and should not be included in achievement motivation. This, in turn leads to operational problems. Without a clear set of parameters, one researcher may operationalize constructs one way and a second researcher another way. While each study may stand on its own, it is difficult to interpret as a whole. Additionally, without a commonly understood conceptual foundation, it is virtually impossible to build valid theoretical models (Elliot & Dweck, 2005).

Another weakness of the concept of “achievement” according to Elliot and Dweck (2005) is that achievement is too narrow in terms of focus and scope. They note that the concept of achievement is assumed by many researchers to be a form of individualistic, self-defining accomplishment. For example, Ames and Archer (1988) define an achievement setting as one where individuals participate in and respond to achievement tasks. Yet, the potential for achievement and achievement motivation is much broader. Elliot and Dweck (2005) note that other achievement conceptualizations include interdependent achievement striving, cooperative achievement striving, and striving for learning and task mastery. These views of achievement go beyond the concepts of achievement developed by researchers who adopt a view of achievement that is based on Western, individualistic societies.

While achievement motivation theory is commonly applied to education, athletics, and business, a broader view would include such activities as avocations and hobbies, as well as social learning and self-improvement. Additionally, a broader view of achievement would also look at creativity, compassion, coping strategies, and autonomous learning. With these thoughts in mind, Elliot and Dweck (2005) offer the concept of competence in lieu of achievement.

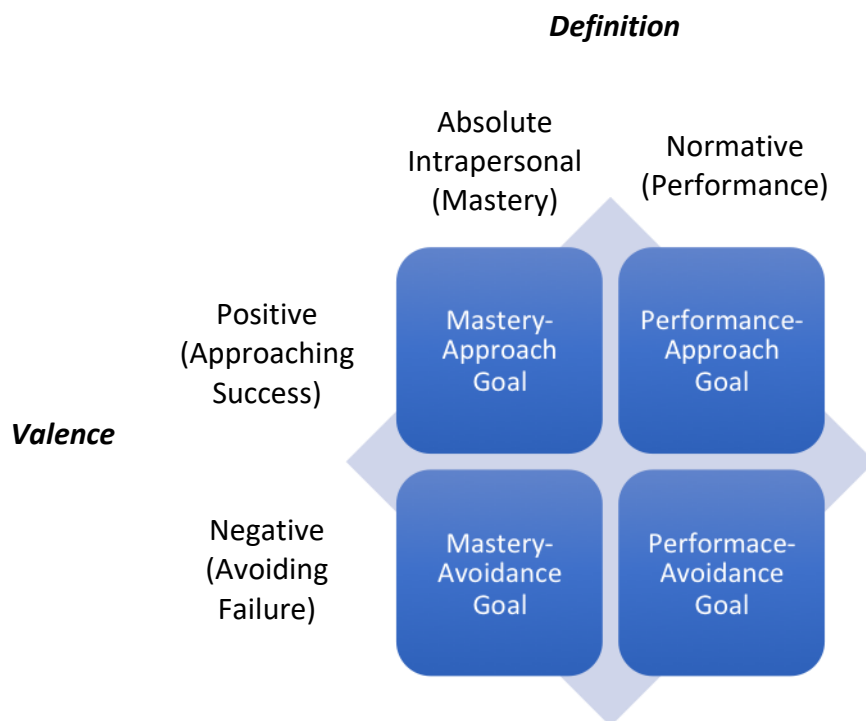
Elliot and Dweck (2005) note that competence is commonly defined as, “a condition or quality of effectiveness, ability, sufficiency or success” (p.5). One advantage of competence is that it is applicable to a broader range of levels than the concept of achievement. For example, competence can be applied to concrete actions, specific outcomes, patterns of skill demonstration, and all-encompassing characteristics such as intelligence. The basis for the concept of competence is that competence is a natural psychological need for human beings. This need for competence, then, directs the individual to develop concrete goals and strategies to satisfy the competence need (Elliot & Church, 2002). Interestingly, while individuals have a *positive* need to demonstrate competence, they may also have a *negative* need to avoid the appearance of incompetence. Indeed, a person may have a strong need to demonstrate competence as a salesperson, but over time, shift to a desire to avoid the demonstration of incompetence. Thus, in terms of the motivational literature, the definition of competence includes both the qualities of “ability, sufficiency, or success” *and* considerations of “ineffectiveness, inability, insufficiency and failure” (Elliot & Dweck, 2005, p. 6).

Elliot (2005) further notes that competence can be defined by the standard used to evaluate it. There are three standards to evaluate competence. One is the absolute standard which relates to the requirements of the task itself. Using life insurance salespeople as an example, one

absolute requirement to make the prestigious Million Dollar Round Table (MDRT, 2018) in 2018 is to earn \$94,000 or more in life insurance commissions (MDRT). A second standard is intrapersonal and relates to what the salesperson thinks of his or her past attainments and potential. Again, using the MDRT as an example, if the salesperson has qualified before and/or believes he or she has the talent and drive to qualify, then that is the standard against which they will measure their competence. Finally, there is the normative standard or the comparison with others. If a salesperson wants to compete and lead the company in sales, then comparison to others is the standard used to evaluate competence.

Competence also has valence (Elliot, 2005). One can construe competence in positive terms such as success or in negative terms like incompetence or failure. Additionally, one can focus on approaching the positive outcome or avoiding the negative outcome. This 2 X 2 framework is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. 2 X 2 Competence Goal Framework



(Adapted from Elliot & McGregor, 2001)

Advantages of Competence Motivation over Achievement Motivation

There are several advantages of the concept of competence rather than achievement. One is that competence is part of daily life. Much of one's activities as humans is motivated or energized by the possibility of competence or incompetence. Examples include everything from improving one's nutrition, to improving a yoga pose, to doing a better job at work, or improving

our social skills. A second advantage is the measureable psychological effect of competence oriented actions. A positive demonstration of competence (approach-oriented) results in joy and pride. Avoiding a negative demonstration of competence (avoidance-oriented) produces relief, while demonstration of incompetence (also avoidance-oriented) produces disappointment and stress (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Elliot & Dweck, 2005).

A third advantage is that competence motivation exists across an entire lifespan and manifests itself in different ways at different ages. The premise of the research proposition portion of this paper is that as a salesperson gets older and more established, their motivation moves from demonstrating sales competence to a competence-relevant motivation of avoiding incompetence (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Finally, a competence motivation approach is not culturally bound. That is, it applies to cultures beyond Canada, the United States, and Western Europe.

Mastery-Avoidance and Sales Plateau

Elliot and McGregor (2001) tested the 2 X 2 model on a group of undergraduate psychology students. Results of the study showed that fear of failure and classroom engagement were positive predictors of a mastery-avoidance goal orientation and self-determination was a negative predictor of mastery-avoidance. In other words, students who had a fear of failure but were engaged in the course were more likely to have a mastery-avoidance goal orientation than students who thought they determined their own destiny.

While Elliot and his colleagues are pioneers in the goal orientation research, almost all of their studies have been done on children, adolescents, and young adults. This may explain the sharp distinction between approach goals as adaptive and avoidance goals as maladaptive. Several researchers employing lifespan psychology have looked at competence goals across a wider range of age groups. Several seminal studies are discussed below.

Ogilvie, Rose, and Heppen (2000) studied the motivation of adolescent, middle-age, and older adults for the subjects' personal projects. In two cross-sectional studies they found that the motive to *acquire* was the most common motivation in all three age groups. To acquire means to undertake a project today in order to obtain positive outcomes in the future. However, this motive declined in importance from the adolescent to the middle-age group and again from the middle-age to the older age group. As the motive to acquire decreased, the motive to *keep* increased, especially in the older group. To keep is to "avoid losing an existing positive condition" (p. 207).

Ebner, et al. (2006) applied lifespan to goal orientation across adulthood. As they expected, older adults reported an orientation toward loss prevention and maintenance while younger adults were primarily interested in a growth orientation. Moreover, older adults reported that a loss prevention and/or maintenance orientation was possibly associated with feelings of well-being while younger adults reported a positive relationship between growth goals and well-being. At the same time, older adults continued to respond favorably to a growth goal orientation indicating that older adults may well perceive opportunities for progress and development.

Finally, Senko and Freund (2015) found that a major reason young adults prefer a master-approach goal orientation is because they feel it is more attainable and results in less pressure than a mastery-avoidance goal orientation. The exact opposite pattern was reported by older adults in terms of the mastery-avoidance goal orientation. These findings confirmed the work of de Lange et al. (2010) who found that master-avoidance goals were most widespread in workers in the late stages of their careers.

The above description is similar to one that may be applied to plateaued employees or salespeople. One problem in pursuing this line of investigation is the dearth of research on plateaued salespeople and the resulting lack of an acceptable definition of what it means to plateau. Slocum, et al. (1985) defined a plateau as the point in a person's career when the likelihood of promotion is very low. Slocum, Cron and Yows (1987) noted that plateauing occurs "when employees decide not to pursue further advancement in the corporation." (p. 31). Yet another definition of plateauing was offered by Feldman and Weitz (1988) and describes plateaued employees as those whose likelihood of receiving increased responsibility is low. The problem with these definitions is that they do not address the professional salesperson who never wanted to be promoted or take on more responsibility – he or she just wants to sell. Thus, the best definition that relates to salespeople is the one offered by *Management Review*. It states simply that a plateaued sales representative is one who has a level of sales that stays steady, but does not increase (*Management Review*, 1995). This is the definition adopted for this paper. The definition fits well with the following quote from Elliot (2005) on the mastery-avoidance goal construct, "Athletes, students, or employees who have sought to maximize their skills and abilities may at some point feel that they have fully exploited their potential ("reached their peak") and shift to a focus on "not doing worse than I have done in the past" (p.61).

Using the MDRT example, a salesperson may have qualified for the MDRT for many years and continued to strive to do better each year. However, the salesperson believes they have "reached their peak" and now want to focus on not doing worse than before, so the goal becomes to do the minimum to qualify for the MDRT. In this way, the salesperson avoids failure or the appearance of incompetence, but is not striving to achieve ever higher levels of sales. This is the plateaued salesperson.

RESEARCH PROPOSALS

With the above explanation of achievement goals as competence goals and the introduction of the 2 X 2 goal orientation construct, the following research propositions are offered in terms of the goal's definition and valence.

The mastery-approach goal orientation is one where a person evaluates his or her competence against some absolute standard and/or his or her past experience and perceived potential. The valence is positive and approaches success. Therefore,

P₁: A mastery-approach goal orientation is positively associated with an endeavor to increase sales performance.

P_{1a}: A mastery-approach goal orientation will result in an absolute and interpersonal evaluation of competence.

The person with a mastery-avoidance goal orientation also evaluates their competence based on an absolute standard and past performance and potential. However, the valence is negative and the primary motive is to avoid the appearance of incompetence and/or the fear of failure. This goal orientation is proposed to be positively associated with sales performance because it is likely a high achiever who has plateaued – that is, kept sales steady but not increasing.

P₂: A mastery-avoidance goal orientation is negatively associated with an endeavor to increase sales performance.

P_{2a}: A mastery-approach goal orientation will result in an absolute and interpersonal evaluation of competence.

Performance-approach goal orientation results in a normative evaluation of competence. That is, the salesperson evaluates his or her performance in terms of how well they compare with other salespeople in the firm or in the same industry. While this may lead to good sales performance, it often also leads to a lack of willingness to take on challenges that might risk failure. Thus, for salespeople

P₃: A performance-approach goal orientation is positively associated with an endeavor to increase sales performance.

P_{3a}: A performance-approach goal orientation will result in a normative evaluation of competence.

Finally, the performance-avoidance goal orientation involves a lack of sales performance and a focus on not looking foolish and avoiding failure, often by not trying. This is the salesperson who is going to start making calls as soon as they understand the product better than anyone else, get their desk organized, and fill out their calendar.

P₄: A performance-avoidance goal orientation is negatively associated with an endeavor to increase sales performance.

P_{4a}: A performance-avoidance goal orientation will result in a normative evaluation of competence.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper contributes to the salesperson motivation literature in both theoretical and practical ways. Theoretically, the arguments made in this paper move the concept of achievement to one of competence. Because competence motivation can be defined more precisely than achievement motivation, the advantages of this shift include a clearer set of parameters that allow for better theoretical models and operation of constructs. Another advantage of the competence concept is that it broadens the scope of the research to include such constructs as social competence, emotional competence, health competence, cultural competence, and moral competence (Elliot & Dweck, 2005). Finally, the shift to competence motivation allows for an analysis of behavior across cultures and an individual's lifespan.

Practically, the 2 X 2 model attempts to better explain salesperson motivation by examining both the definition and the valence of competence motivation. The addition of the mastery-avoidance construct in particular may explain the behavior of the plateaued salesperson. The identification of this construct will aid sales managers in addressing plateauing problems. Further, because sales managers are often providing the enabling conditions in which the plateaued salesperson motivates themselves, the identification of this construct could better assist management's understanding of how to effectively motivate the plateaued salesperson.

Another practical application of the competence motivation concept is that competency expectations can exert influence on goal orientation (Elliot & Church, 1997). Manipulating salesperson competency expectations could help sales managers reduce or eliminate the performance-avoidance orientation.

There are actions managers make take to encourage a growth mindset for older workers. For example, PNC Financial uses what they term "multigenerational teams" where younger and older workers are paired in all phases of product and service innovation and design. This accomplishes two goals. One, each group learns from the other and has a better understanding of the firm's target market. Second, there is opportunity for professional growth across all age groups.

Numerous areas for further research are possible from the perspective taken in this paper. While there has been work on mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoid achievement goal orientation (e.g., Silver et al., 2006), the development of a scale for salespeople that more accurately reflects competence is needed to test these propositions. Scale items from Elliot and McGregor (2001) are a starting point for this and the mastery-avoidance construct.

Additionally, other social-cognitive constructs may affect goal orientation across all age groups. While goal orientation is considered a proximal cause of behavior, it is possibly a mid-level construct with an antecedent. Thus, the sequence would be antecedent → goal orientation → behavior. One such construct that future researchers may want to consider is self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989). Goals increase self-regulation through their impact on motivation, learning, self-efficacy (one's belief about his or her likelihood of success in performing a specific task), and self-evaluations of progress (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). The operation of goals in self-regulation to include the influence of goal orientation could provide sales managers a better understanding to be able to work with salespeople and help them effectively manage their careers.

Another construct worthy of investigation is implicit personality theory (a/k/a lay theory) as proposed by Dweck and Leggett (1988). Implicit personality theory is a personality construct and forms the way people see the world. It includes naïve (that is not easily understood or articulated by the individual) assumptions about the self and others. Thus, goal orientation may exist between implicit personality theory and behavior.

Additionally, with the competence motivation concept, researchers can examine the possible changes in competency valence over the lifespan of a salesperson. This may, as this paper suggests, better explain the plateaued salesperson and possibly other motivational changes. Further, understanding the causes of salespersons plateauing relative to goal orientation may help the sales manager identify the symptoms early on and provide various support and creative solutions. As previously stated, plateaued salespeople often have strong, successful records of past performance and are too valuable to dismiss without first attempting to find solutions to reestablish their enthusiasm and performance.

Further, as Ebner, et al. (2006) noted, older workers do not surrender their desire for improvement and skill development. Instead, they maximize their physical, emotional, and cognitive resources to obtain desired ends. Sales managers may be able to re-direct some of this growth orientation to more positive results for the firm.

From the list above the following can be researched to the benefit of sales managers: social competence (helpful in teaming); emotional competence (adaptive selling and customer orientation); health competence (controlling health care costs); moral competence (avoiding ethical problems); and cultural competence (important in an ever increasing globalized marketplace).

In summary, the concepts presented in this paper address a broad, new perspective with which to study the motivation of salespeople and other employees. The proposed 2 X 2 competence goal framework is ripe for future research and can provide an important contribution in salesforce management research.

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