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Outcome-Based Control System And Seller's Final Performance : The Mediating Role Of Self-Control

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Abstract: *This study analyzes the behavior of salespeople in a outcome-based control system according to salesperson's outcome performance. Moreover, the study aims to show how self-control, which is inherent in the individual, regulates salespeople's behaviors in a dynamic environment. Using data from 216 sales professionals in Côte d'Ivoire, an empirical analysis is conducted through structural equation model. The results show that results-based control has no direct influence on final output. But this influence is completely mediated by the seller's self-control.*

Key words: *outcomes-based control, final performance, self-control, salespeople.*

I. Introduction

For many companies, the sales force is the only organizational entity generating revenue and profit (Miao and Evans, 2013; Miao, Evans and Li, 2017). However, in most organizations, salespeople usually work alone and are only evaluated on the basis of outcomes such as sales quotas (Anderson et Oliver, 1987; Darmon et Martin, 2011; Jaworski, 1988; Malek, Sarin et Jaworski, 2018). Under these circumstances, many researchers agree that competitive pressure and short-term sales objectives can generate among sellers, attitudes and behaviors that are contrary to the achievement of performance targets (Wang, Dou et Zhou, 2012; Echchakoui, 2013; Kim et Tiwana, 2014; Panagopoulos, Johnson et Mothersbaugh, 2015; Goebel et Weibenberger, 2016).

In addition, a recent study by the Chiefs Sales Officers Insights found that approximately 80% of salespeople are struggling to meet their sales quotas. This observation is real in the mobile telephony sector in Côte d'Ivoire. Indeed, this sector, exposed to a severe competition, represents on average 7 to 8% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), with an average increase of 2.5% in its turnover over the last three years. However, an exploratory survey of five (5) sales managers reveals that the majority of sellers in this sector fail to achieve the expected performance and that about two-thirds of the performance of some companies is achieved by a tiny part of the sales force.

From a managerial perspective, this implies that sales managers need to know the personal characteristics that can help salesperson to succeed in a context of market pressure. In this vein, many researchers agree that one of the most important personal characteristics in a sales relationship is the sellers' self-control (Friend, Johnson, Luthans and Sohi, 2016 Gillebaart and De Ridder, 2015). Indeed, self-control often reflects a resource on which an individual can rely to improve their effectiveness. However, it differs from across individuals and most of the time, it interacts with situational factors to guide human behavior.

Self-control is recognized as an individual ability to change and adapt to the self in order to produce a better fit between oneself and one's environment (Rothbaum, Weisz and Snyder, 1982). Therefore, in the current context where competition and market pressure are heightened, what role the seller's self-control can play in achieving the desired sales targets in a outcome-based control?

In order to answer this question, the rest of the work is organized as follows: Section 2 gives a brief literature review and presents the research hypotheses. Next, the research methodology is presented in section 3. Section 4 reports and discusses the results. Finally, Section 5 concludes the study and presents the prospects for future research.

II. Literature review and research hypotheses

1. Literature review

To get employees to focus on organizational goals related to sales, sales organizations typically use some type of sales control system. Anderson and Oliver (1987: 76) define it as "a set of organizational procedures for monitoring, directing, evaluating and compensating its employees". These authors further suggest that a sales control system can be designed as an outcome-based control (Anderson and Oliver, 1987; Echchakoui, 2013).

Outcome-based control is like a principle whereby the manager uses incentives such as commissions to reward salespeople based on their immediate sales results such as sales volume or quotas (Anderson and Oliver, 1987; Jaworski, 1988; Kohli, Shervani and Challagalla, 1998; Darmon and Martin, 2011; Krafft, DeCarlo, Poujol and Tanner, Jr. 2012; Madhani, 2015). This type of control holds salespeople accountable for sales results (Anderson and Oliver, 1987). This is because the manager is less involved in directing the sales process. They just set sales goals and monitor their achievement levels (Cravens, Ingram, Laforge and Young, 1993; Wang, Dou and Zhou, 2012).

Furthermore, following previous work on sales forces, we make a distinction between aspects of behavior, customer relations and the results of sales force performance (Panagopoulos and Avlonitis, 2010; Jaworski and Maclnnis, 1989; Panagopoulos, Johnson and Mothersbaugh, 2015). However, according to Anderson and Oliver (1987), all sales activities carried out by salespeople are aimed at helping to achieve results (such as sales volume and market share). Yet, achieving these results does not happen automatically; it requires both efforts to execute specific behaviors and activities to retain clients (Baldauf, Cravens, and Piercy 2005). In other words, the most relevant aspect of a salesperson's performance is their contribution to the bottom line. Likewise, Panagopoulos et al. (2015) have shown that, like control or supervision procedures, all other aspects (behavior and customer relations) of performance contribute to the achievement of final results. Therefore, in this work, we will only be interested in the final performance which represents the final results that result from the efforts of the salespeople.

2. Statement of hypotheses

As noted above, outcome-based control involves setting specific sales targets and monitoring the level of achievement, without interfering in the sales process. According to Locke and Latham's (1991) goal theory, salespeople who are given clear outcome targets have the will and are empowered and motivated to focus on the behaviors that can lead them to the achievement of outcome targets (Cravens, Ingram, Laforge and Young, 1993). Thus, several research studies have shown that a control based on the results can be implemented to influence the final results of the salesmen (Jaworski, 1988; Kohli, Shervani and Challagalla, 1998). As argued by Jaworski et al. (1993), outcome control is positively related to behavioral performance because behaviors exist as a supporting function for the pursuit and achievement of outcomes (Jaworski and Kohli, 1991). As well, when salespeople are tracked and evaluated based on end results, the manager leaves them the choice of strategies and the level of effort required to achieve increasing results. As a result, sellers have more autonomy and discretion to make decisions. This motivates them to find the appropriate behaviors to achieve the desired results (Wang, Dou and Zhou, 2012). Therefore, if the seller is subject to outcome-based control, he will adopt the best behaviors to achieve the desired results, hence:

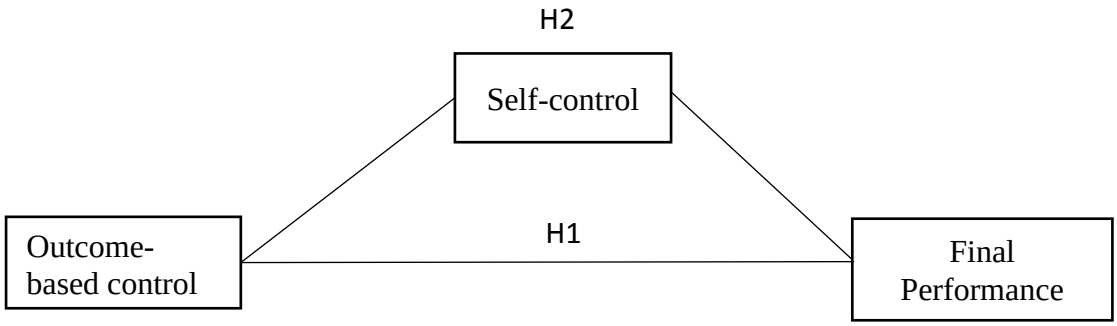
H1: outcome-based control positively influences the seller's final performance.

In the new business environment where relational selling behaviors have become the norm to attract more customers, the emphasis is increasingly on more flexible and spontaneous mechanisms for controlling salespeople. It is in this context that the seller's self-control emerges as a cardinal value that explains his sales behavior. According to Locke and Latham (1991), in pursuit of established sales goals, salespeople who develop a high level of self-control will be able to adopt behaviors that adapt to the environment and achieve the desired results. Indeed, the salesperson's ability to exercise self-control is arguably one of the most important and beneficial adaptations to their work. Self-control is operational when the salesperson sets personal goals, monitors their achievement and adjusts his behavior (Jaworski, 1988; Manz, Mossholder and Luthans, 1987). It is essential in the functioning of salespeople, leads them to remain focused on the essentials and leads to improved sales performance (Gillebaart and De Ridder, 2015). In a sales context, self-control is crucial in resolving self-regulatory dilemmas that force the salesperson to choose between an option of immediate gain and a more beneficial long-term goal. It is an "active self" who is able to prioritize long-term goals over short-term ones (Friend, Johnson, Luthans and Sohi, 2016). Thus, a good self-control of the seller can help strengthen

his will to channel his efforts around activities that maximize his results. This allows to formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: Self-control mediates positively the relationship of outcome-based control and final performance.

3. Research model



III. Research methodology

This section presents the target population sample, the data collection, the variable measurements and the analytical approach to the data collected.

I. Sampling and data collection

The data were collected by questionnaire from a convenience sample of 216 sales professionals in Côte d'Ivoire. The administration of the questionnaire was conducted by a team of ten Ph.D Candidates. The collected sample can be described as follows: most of the respondents (75.5%) are men aged on average 25 years old with an average professional experience of 4 years. 60% of these respondents have a higher level of education.

II. Measurement

Variables are measured by adapting different approaches to the Ivorian context. Thus, outcome-based control is measured following Wang, Dou and Zhou (2012) (from 1-Strongly disagree to 5-Strongly agree); final performance is measured following Panagopoulos and Avlonitis (2010) (from 1-Need for improvement to 5-exceptional) and self-control was measured following Tangney, Baumeister and Boone (2004) (from 1-Not at all disagree to 5-Strongly agree).

III. Analytical approach

Before moving on to the specification of the measurement model, it is necessary to make a distinction between reflective and formative constructs. Indeed, as argued by Lacroux (2009), this distinction has an influence on the quality of the measurement model and indirectly on the validity of the results of the structural model. All the constructs mobilized in this research are a reflexive nature. The items of each construct are significantly and positively correlated with each other since they all represent the same underlying construct, and the deletion of an item has no significant consequence on the construct. In addition, since the sample size is quite large (216 respondents), the maximum likelihood method is preferred over the Partial Least Square (PLS) method for the estimates. The statistical processing and scale tests were carried out on the AMOS software version 23.

In order to adapt the scales used to the context of the present research, it is first necessary to carry out a clearance of items and a confirmatory analysis. For items clearance, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is carried out under a Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. The item conservation criteria relate to the factorial contribution per item (> 0.5), an overall KMO (> 0.5), a significant Bartlett (0.000) and Cronbach reliability (> 0.6). In addition, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) shows that the measurement model has a good fit to the data ($x2/ddl = 1.138$; $GFI = 0.956$; $AGFI = 0.941$; $RMSEA = 0.021$; $SRMR = 0.36$; $IFI = 0.997$; $NFI = 0.975$; $CFI = 0.997$; $TLI = 0.996$; $CAIC = 388.289$ (1036.439)).

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is calculated as well as the Composite Reliability (CR) for each variable. For all variables, the AVE is greater than the reference value (0.50) recommended in the literature

(Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As for CRs, all of them meet the suggested threshold of 0.70. (Gurviez and Korchia, 2002). Table 1 presents each measurement scale along with its extracted mean variance (AVE) and composite reliability (CR).

Table 1**:** Factor structure from confirmatory analysis

Variables	Items	Contribution	CR	AVE
Outcome-based control	Specific sales goals are established for my work	.871	.931	.729
	My supervisor monitors the level of achievement of my sales targets	.874		
	If my goals are not met, I am required to explain why	.864		
	My boss always gives me feedback on how well I am achieving my goals	.851		
	I get bonuses when I exceed my sales targets	.810		
Self-control	I refrain from doing things because they interfere with my work	.890	.959	.825
	I always act after thinking about all the alternatives	.923		
	I rarely lose my mind during exchanges	.947		
	I don't do anything under the influence of the moment	.866		
Final performance	The turnover (in FCFA) that I generate for our company	.928	.935	.780
	My contribution to identifying and selling to large buyers	.884		
	My contribution to the achievement of sales or general contracts with long-term profitability	.893		
	Achieving my sales quotas	.826		

Source: Author calculations

In order to assess the convergent and discriminant validities, the Maximum Shared Squared Variance (MSV) and the Average Shared Squared Variance (ASV) are calculated for each variable. The assessment of the convergent validity was made by comparing for each variable the value of the AVE to that of the CR. Results show that the AVE is lower than the CR for all variables. This proves the convergent validity. To assess discriminant validity, the AVE was compared to the MSV and the ASV. It is shown that the AVE is greater than the MSV which in turn is greater than the ASV for all variables. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), this indicates that the discriminant validity is verified.

The hypothesis test was done using the structural equations model under SPSS AMOS version 23. The results from the hypothesis test are presented in the following section.

IV. Presentation and discussion of the results

1. Presentation of the results

The results obtained from the statistical processing are shown in Table 2 below.

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
MS	<---	CBR	,247	,097	2,546	,022	par_11
PR	<---	MS	,189	,094	2,012	,044	par_12
PR	<---	CBR	,109	,099	1,098	,272	par_13

Table 2**:** Results of the research hypothesis test.

Source**:** extract from the treatment under Amos

2. Discussion of the results

First, the results show that there is no significant direct link between outcome-based control and the seller's bottom-line performance. Thus, the first hypothesis (H1) which stated a positive influence of outcome-based control on outcome performance is rejected. This result is quite surprising since it runs counter to the prescription of Locke and Latham's (1991) goal theory. According to Cravens et al. (1993), salespeople who receive clear results goals have willpower. They are empowered and motivated to focus on activities that are likely to help them achieve end results. However, they confirm some research which recognizes that outcome-based control directs salespeople's behaviors toward goals only simultaneously with process behaviors (Jaworski

1988; Kohli, Shervani, and Challagalla 1998). Moreover, our results are similar to that of Panagopoulos, Johnson and Mothersbaugh, (2015).

In addition, the current context in which the sales forces operate is in the grip of ever-increasing instability with its corollary of pressure and stress. While results-based control recommends that the manager exert no control over the sales process (Anderson and Oliver 1987; Darmon and Martin, 2011). The seller is required to take the immediate pressure and bear the risks associated with the sale. In these circumstances, contrary to what some authors postulate (Anderson and Oliver 1987; Cravens, Ingram, Laforge and Young, 1993; Evans, Landry, Li and Zou, 2007), salespeople are likely to overlook certain high-performance aspects which are in line with a mindset oriented towards productive behavior. Furthermore, they may engage in practices that, on the whole, are neither detrimental nor conducive to established sales processes and daily procedures (Panagopoulos, Johnson and Mothersbaugh, 2015). Therefore, managers must be aware of this reality and avoid, in the pursuit of outcome-based control activities, salespeople engaging in dysfunctional and unproductive behaviors.

Second, the results show that under outcome-based control, salespeople develop a level of self-control that enables them to achieve expected results in the field. This confirms the second hypothesis (H2) which postulates a positive mediation of the seller's self-control in the relation of his outcome-based control and his final performance. Indeed, because outcome-based control does not require monitoring of day-to-day activities (Jaworski, 1988), salespeople enjoy considerable autonomy in choosing their own behaviors (Anderson and Onyemah 2006). This perceived autonomy reassures salespeople of a manager's trust in them (Miao and Evans 2012) and it encourages them to initiate functional behaviors and to be creative (Wang, Dou, and Zhou 2012; Wang and Netemeyer, 2004). Thus, according to Evans et al. (2007), because of its motivational nature, it is quite possible that outcome-based control allows salespeople to coordinate their efforts to effectively accomplish sales activities (Panagopoulos, Johnson and Mothersbaugh, 2015).

On the other hand, control theory predicts that the customer becomes king under results-based control (Anderson and Onyemah 2006). The risk of obtaining results shifts from the company to the salesperson who must then act like an entrepreneur in order to gain as many customers as possible (Anderson and Oliver, 1987; Anderson and Onyemah, 2006). Thus, the salesperson "entrepreneur" becomes responsible for his work (Jaworski, 1988), he sets his own objectives and processes (Jaworski and Maclnnis, 1989), engages systems of self-monitoring and self-evaluation and inflicts sanctions on his own if necessary (Manz, Mossholder and Luthanvs, 1987). According to Manz (1986), when the salesperson achieves this level of self-control, he is gained by a strong sense of self-competence which characterizes his working behavior. It is a kind of intrinsic motivation that allows him to correct or modify his behavior to achieve the desired results (Agarwal and Ramaswami, 1993). Thus, salesperson's self-control eliminates opportunistic behaviors and increases the adoption of behaviors that maximize sales results (Agarwal and Ramaswami, 1993). Consequently, it is legitimate to think that sales managers should orient their coaching policies more and more towards the development of (further) self-control and self-management capacities in their employees.

This can be done through an inclusive management which requires that the management decisions or the control policies of the sales teams be a co-construction of all the stakeholders. That is to say involving everyone, at all hierarchical levels and at all stages of decision-making. Thus, the sellers, who are usually among the recipients of the prescribed actions, are invested with the capacity to intervene on their definition. Under these conditions, they work without the weight of the impression that everything is imposed on them and they are increasingly flexible and free to take initiative.

V. Final remarks

This study is an important contribution to research on sales force control. The results show that vendor self-control completely mediates the relationship of outcome-based control and its end results. This is a response to several previous calls (Panagopoulos, Johnson and Mothersbaugh, 2015; Dao, 2018). Indeed, according to their research, these authors found that there was no direct effect of outcome-based control on the performance of the end result. Therefore, they hoped that future research would consider exploring mediation mechanisms in order to fully uncover the effects of outcome-based control. However, our results cannot be exempt from some limitations which may constitute avenues for future research. The first limitation is linked to the choice of the sample for convenience, which does not allow these results to be generalized. Consequently, a study of a carefully chosen sample from various industries could produce some pretty interesting results. The second limitation concerns the performance assessor. We have chosen a self-assessment by the seller himself. According to some authors (Farh, Werbel and Bedelan, 1988; Vaughan, 2003), self-assessments are steeped in the experience of the individual. Indeed, the ego is an observer, always present, of its actions and behaviors. From this perspective, self-assessments are valuable sources of information for a good performance assessment.

However, it should be kept in mind that when individuals are called upon to self-assess, they tend to overestimate or underestimate their abilities or performance (Jaramillo, Carrillat and Locander, 2005). Since we did not have statistics on the evaluation of their performance, we were satisfied with the subjective evaluations of the surveyed salespeople. As a result, future research using the manager or supervisor could be an important contribution.

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Estimates (Group number 1 - Default model)

Scalar Estimates (Group number 1 - Default model)

Maximum Likelihood Estimates

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
MS	<---	CBR	,247	,097	2,546	,022	par_11
PR	<---	MS	,189	,094	2,012	,044	par_12
PR	<---	CBR	,109	,099	1,098	,272	par_13
PR3	<---	PR	1,000				
PR4	<---	PR	1,074	,062	17,353	***	par_1
PR6	<---	PR	,925	,055	16,755	***	par_2
PR7	<---	PR	,798	,072	11,049	***	par_3
CR7	<---	CBR	1,000				
CR4	<---	CBR	1,053	,063	16,793	***	par_4
CR3	<---	CBR	1,053	,062	17,035	***	par_5
CR2	<---	CBR	1,114	,064	17,451	***	par_6
CR1	<---	CBR	1,075	,062	17,400	***	par_7
MS5	<---	MS	1,000				
MS6	<---	MS	1,159	,094	12,264	***	par_8
MS7	<---	MS	1,168	,096	12,205	***	par_9
MS9	<---	MS	,820	,079	10,332	***	par_10

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
MS	<---	CBR	,235
PR	<---	MS	,159
PR	<---	CBR	,076
PR3	<---	PR	,825
PR4	<---	PR	,935
PR6	<---	PR	,911
PR7	<---	PR	,677
CR7	<---	CBR	,860
CR4	<---	CBR	,861
CR3	<---	CBR	,871
CR2	<---	CBR	,886
CR1	<---	CBR	,880
MS5	<---	MS	,788
MS6	<---	MS	,812
MS7	<---	MS	,845
MS9	<---	MS	,699