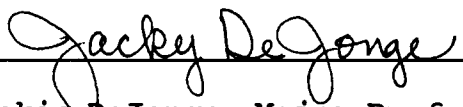


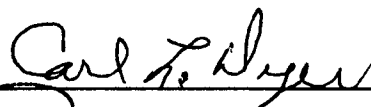
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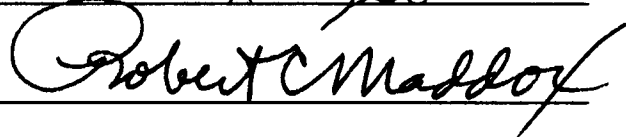
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GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION IN THE RETAIL SETTING

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Karen S. Sanborn

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ABSTRACT

Increasing salesforce productivity is a major concern to retailers. By keeping labor costs down and increasing sales a stable profit can be maintained. Presently graphic communication has been an untapped area in this field. Therefore this study was undertaken to determine if performance feedback can elicit selling motivation. A conceptual framework was developed from three theories. Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan's (1986) framework of selling; Churchill and Ford's (1977) concepts of strategy and effort; and Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor's (1979) interworkings of feedback were combined into a conceptual model of salesforce performance.

The sample consisted of 244 salespeople and department managers from a southeastern department store. There were five stores within the chain. The sample included departments common throughout the chain.

Graphic communication was produced by using the compute program Prox-X-11, part of the SAS package. It is an adaptation of the Bureau of the Census X-11 seasonal adjustment program. It creates output containing an adjusted time series, screening for seasonality. The objective of this study was to determine if graphic communication would produce an increase in sales and hours between experimental and control groups. By using an Analysis of Variance, graphic communication was not found to increase either variable.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. Introduction

The characteristics indigenous to the retail setting are valuable when developing cost cutting techniques. Retail salespeople represent their company to the customer, and thus may enhance their company's profits. Salespeople also provide the customer with something important: a lasting impression of the store. If the customer service, store image, or cleanliness is not to the customer's liking, there may be little chance of a return visit. This jeopardizes the organization's main goal: high sales.

Salespeople have a direct link to the company. They are the driving force toward profit and their wages hold the largest portion of the company's budget. With this in mind, they serve as a potential source to increase the productivity ratio. To hold down costs, retail salespeople are often required to work alone. Being physically and psychologically separated from other personnel, as well as supervision, impairs their communication. This separation tends to produce a lack of role structure.

Since salespeople do not gather in one common location, nor do they have direct supervision, they will set their own

priorities. A well structured communication plan, focusing on autonomy and feedback of sales performance, can be an enormous aid in allocating a salesforce's time more efficiently. In turn this may improve a company's return on its investment in sales talent (Moynahan 1983). The purpose of this study is to develop and test a feedback system directed at salesforce performance. Sales totals will be used to calculate a trend line showing the performance of each department in the study. These trend lines will allow managers to quickly portray the effectiveness of their staff's efforts to achieve sales goals. This management tool will also give the sales staff a chance to see how their performance affects their department over time.

II. Salesforce Performance: A Conceptual Model

To develop a feedback communication plan, the relationship of the variables relating to selling performance must be understood. While researching selling performance, three theories were discovered. Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan's (1986) framework of selling Churchill and Ford's (1977); concepts of strategy and effort, and Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor's (1979) interworkings of feedback were integrated to form a conceptual model of selling performance.

Selling performance is a continuous loop. The beginning starts with a source of information. This source could be

anything from a customer's non-verbal reaction to sales figures. Information is broken down into two types of feedback, outcome and cognitive. Outcome feedback is raw information about performance. The individual receiving this feedback is responsible for determining whether performance was successful or not, and how to modify behavior to make it successful. Cognitive feedback is the opposite of outcome feedback. It is descriptive communication about performance including how to change work habits to become more successful. Cognitive feedback is typically used in training programs.

Once communication is received the individual differences of each salesperson moderate any action to be taken. Every individual has their own way of perceiving feedback. Both cognitive and outcome feedback can be misconstrued if not clearly stated. Once salespeople acknowledge information, they then need to accept it as an accurate indicator of performance (figure 1.). At this stage, if individuals rationalize about situational circumstances and are allowed to substitute external forces for the reason of poor performance, behavior modification will be limited. When feedback is accepted as valid, an individual must have a desire to respond to the feedback. Many communication plans fail at this stage due to the apathy of the participants. However, if there is a desire to modify behavior toward successful selling performance, then goals will be set accordingly.

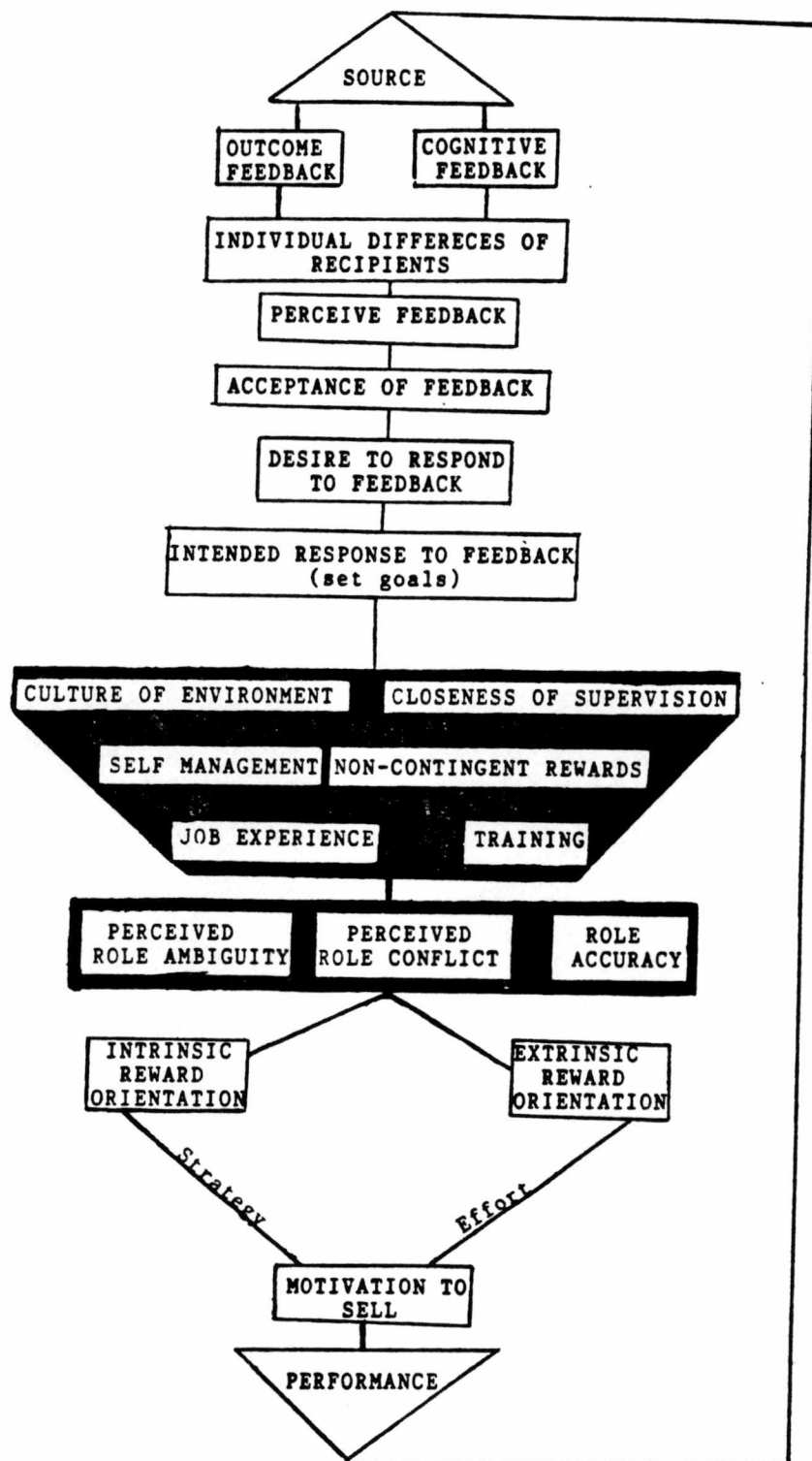


Figure 1. Salesforce Performance

The salesperson and the new goal enter the work environment. In this setting they interact with several variables that can either encourage or hinder goal achievement. These variables control how the salesperson views the job at hand. The culture of the work environment, closeness of supervision, amount of self management, job experience, training, and non-contingent rewards all play a part in how easily goals are to be met. New goals are easier to achieve when there is role accuracy. Role accuracy occurs when both the salesperson and the work environment agree on the definition of work performance. However, if the salesperson starts with a clear definition of acceptable performance, sets a goal toward it, and then interacts with variables that are incongruent with the definition of performance, there is role conflict. If a clear definition of performance does not exist at all, role ambiguity exists. In either of these cases, goals can be abandoned.

As a collective group, sales performance variables and role perceptions lead to reward orientations. These are extrinsic and intrinsic reward orientations. A salesperson with an extrinsic reward orientation would be motivated by external rewards such as money. When a person with this type of reward orientation fails to perform successfully, failure is attributed to insufficient effort. Thus to gain successful performance, he increases the effort expended. With an intrinsic reward orientation, a salesperson is motivated by

the job itself and looks at failure as a learning experience. Performance is used to create and perfect the strategies implemented in the work environment. It is important to note the two reward orientations are not polar extremes. Salespeople may use both reward orientations enroute to motivation and, ultimately, performance.

The end performance becomes the source of raw information. This information is placed into a medium which is communicated to the salesforce, whether it be cognitive or outcome feedback. For this feedback to affect motivation and performance, individuals must perceive or acknowledge it, and accept it as accurate feedback. Once this has occurred, they then must want to respond to the information presented, as well as know how to respond to it. This complete process is mediated by individual differences which are continually re-evaluated through the outcomes of this exchange.

III. Definitions Of Terms

Specific terms used throughout this study are defined in the following.

1. Outcome feedback is the degree to which work activities required result in the individual obtaining direct information concerning his or her sales totals. This feedback does not include information pertaining to the success or failure of performance.

2. Group outcome feedback is the degree to which work activities result in the group obtaining direct information concerning its sales totals, and again does not include descriptive information.

3. Personnel's individual attributes are the characteristics as follows: age, sex, educational level, length of service.

4. Attribution process is defined as the instigation of a thought process concerning behavior and the feedback obtained from such behavior.

5. Productivity ratio is the relationship between employee inputs and sales achieved from such inputs.

6. Feedback obstruction is defined as inhibiting an individual from receiving information concerning his or her performance.

7. Role perception contains three areas, role accuracy, where the individual and the work environment agree on the definition of work performance. Role conflict, when both the individual and the work environment have clear definitions of work performance but they do not agree. Role ambiguity occurs when there is not a clear definition of work performance.

8. Reward orientations are either intrinsic or extrinsic. An intrinsically orientated person is driven by internal states of being. An extrinsically orientated person is driven by tangible objects.

IV. Research Objectives

It is this attribution process between performance and feedback that will be the topic for this study. Due to its easy manipulation, this study will only address outcome feedback. Outcome feedback is defined as sales performance that is in written form without information concerning success or failure from the supervisors. As stated earlier, sales trends will be plotted as line graphs. Those graphs will allow managers to portray raw sales totals in relationship to department goals. The purpose is to discover how performance feedback affects upcoming performance. Chapter II contains a summary of the literature related to major factors of this study: feedback, supervision and self-management, recognition and rewards, obstruction of feedback, performance, productivity, and lastly feedback and productivity.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I. Supervision Versus Self-management

When dealing with human behavior several variables can arise. Selling behavior is no exception to this statement as seen by the conceptual model. Although selling environments have basic characteristics, each retail setting has its own personality that distinguishes it from any other. The supervisors' interpersonal skills, the organizational hierarchy, and even the age of the salesforce can have an affect on selling behavior.

Supervisors are involved in the departmental goal setting process. These individuals transmit decisions from higher management to subordinates, as well as convey their subordinates' ideas back to higher management. The amount of supervision is a major determinant of a salesperson's autonomy and feedback. When an individual lacks adequate supervision or feedback, uncertainty concerning how he is to perform arises. This role ambiguity may produce more mental anxiety and tension and less job satisfaction. The major cause of role ambiguity is either the non-existence of information or the lack of adequate communication (Condry and Wall, 1985). In a study of 138 salespeople from five different Midwestern

department stores, Teas (1981) related the concepts of satisfaction, role ambiguity, and supervisory practice. Teas found that when retail supervisors initiate structure in the selling environment, the level of job satisfaction rose among salespeople. Bagozzi (1978) also found role ambiguity and communication from management have relationships with sales personnel's levels of self esteem. He discovered a negative relationship between role ambiguity and self esteem. He suggests that self esteem can be enhanced by communication of management's expectations of its salesforce, thus decreasing role ambiguity.

Self esteem entails feelings and cognitions that are primarily concerned with the internal state of the individual. Within this internal state, people make attributions and cognitive evaluations of relationships between the events in the world. They evaluate their own actions and the outcomes resulting from those actions. These attributions about things external to the individual serve as important motives. They also provide a means for the self-monitoring of behaviors and adjustment of one's actions to meet goals effectively. Performance information energizes the attribution process (Steers and Mowday 1981; Heider 1958). Briefly, from a salesforce motivation perspective, the attribution process would be elicited if a salesperson achieved unexpected results or failed to perform a well-defined task satisfactorily. The initiation of this attribution process is influenced by the

degree to which a salesperson might ask himself or herself "why" an event occurred (Hastie 1984).

The provision of performance feedback is an important supervisory variable. It can reduce employee stress (Gibson 1973) as well as increase role clarity and feelings of self-fulfillment (Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1977; Teas, Wacker and Hughes 1979). Thus role ambiguity experienced by the salespeople is likely to be reduced when they are closely supervised, and when there is frequent communication with supervision.

Self-management is the development of autonomous work groups. These work groups are particularly advantageous when the problem to be solved is not highly structured, subordinates have more information than their managers for solving the problem, and the solutions to the problem must be accepted by the subordinates to ensure implementation (Maier 1970; Manz and Sims 1980; Vroom and Yetton 1973). Autonomy is provided by giving the subordinates the ability to allocate the pace of task completion. Operations are so grouped as to allow "team" responsibility for sharing and integrating the work tasks. In this respect autonomous work groups, by definition, take on many of the functions traditionally ascribed to supervision.

With the lack of direct supervision currently prevalent at the retail setting, self-management techniques would not impede on first-line supervisory functions. It would,

however, add a control method. A communication program dictating the sales goals and the attainment of these goals would provide supervisors with a technique for keeping track of their departments without spending extra time in them. It would also help the salesforce direct their efforts toward organizational goals they may not have known otherwise due to lack of supervision (Condry, Wall 1985; A Work In America Institute Policy Study 1982). One can see that a self-management setting can be a valuable tool in the retail industry. It may produce an increased awareness of performance results (Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1977).

II. Feedback

Feedback is the degree to which work activities required results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her job performance (Teas 1981, Condry, Wall 1985). Distinction is made between outcome feedback and cognitive feedback (Hammond, McClelland and Mumpower 1980; Jacoby, Mazursky, Troutman, Kuss 1984). Outcome is feedback information on whether or not a desired outcome, such as a quota, is met. This type of feedback enables salespeople to assess their performance. In contrast, cognitive feedback provides information on how and why the desired outcome is achieved or not achieved. Cognitive feedback is particularly helpful in gaining

procedural knowledge because it helps identify the contingencies between the salesperson's behavior and effective performance in a given situation. This type of feedback is used in training programs and year-end performance appraisals.

There are five potential sources of feedback in an employment setting--one's self, the task, one's co-workers, the supervisor, and the formal organization. Several studies have been conducted on each and their relationship to the interworkings of feedback. These are described below.

The ability to generate self-feedback usually follows from experience. Once a standard is developed, an internal assessment can take place (Greller and Harold, 1975). This is known as the attribution process. The attribution process and its ultimate affect is a function of past performance and individual difference. In the attribution process the individual tries to find a reason for a certain event. Internal attributions or rationalizations would include the individual's ability, effort, mood, etc. While external attributions would be such factors as task difficulty, luck, and unusual help from others. There are three types of information that can be used in attributing assessments--the consistency of information, the consensus of the information as well as the distinctiveness of it. Consistency is how often the event happens to the individual, where as consensus refers to how many other individuals were involved at the time. Lastly, distinctiveness deals with if the same event

is happening to others as well. If consistent patterns of performance develop over time, attribution patterns emerge. Once a performance pattern has been established, an unexpected performance incident will trigger the attribution process (Teas and McElroy, 1986).

Feedback may also be obtained directly from performance of the task. For example, an automobile salesman can receive a written order from his client upon completion of the sales presentation. This is an example of clear task feedback (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). The task itself, completed or uncompleted, offers its own feedback. The knowledge of failure or success elicits the attribution process (Teas 1981; Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1977). When the sales associate receives immediate task feedback, such as failure, then internal assessments are made. Several factors are taken into account. They range from how often failure has occurred in the past at the same task, how many others were involved that could have caused the failure, and how many times this failure occurs to other sales associates given the same circumstances.

Co-workers provide feedback to each other. They also serve as standards for both comparative and reflective appraisal in the attribution process (Jones and Gerald 1967). Co-workers serve another function as well. The social pressure co-workers exert can be a motivator. However, the size of the work group becomes important here. When giving performance feedback, the group size determines how

significant each member perceives their contribution is to the total group. The significance of each individuals contribution is inversely proportional to the size of the group. For example, if a large retail firm communicates store wide sales totals then individuals will not perceive the significance of their contribution. Here the individual can blend in and ignore social pressures to contribute to the group's goals-- higher sales. The comparative appraisals to other employees may exert social pressures. A small group will allow for interpersonal communication to take place promoting the attribution process. In a large retail store, departmental work groups would provide a large enough group to present social pressures for conformity in sales goals, and at the same time allow each employee to recognize contributions to their goals (Globerson, Poole 1978).

The information received from supervisors has been traditionally the primary source of feedback. They are often viewed as links between their departments and higher retail officials. Supervisors are also important in the attribution process. They provide the new employee feedback on successful or unsuccessful performance. This in turn starts the basis for internal assessment (Condry and Wall 1985). Although Ilgen (1979), states the affects of feedback depend on each person's differences in character, Teas (1981) suggests the performance feedback can enhance a salesforces' satisfaction with supervision. Baggozi (1978) further states increasing

supervisory feedback decreases a salesperson's role ambiguity, enhancing the salesperson's self-esteem. All agree the provision of performance feedback is a valuable supervisory variable. It reduces employee stress by promoting role clarity (Gibson 1973). Thus role ambiguity experienced by salespeople is likely to be reduced with close supervision and frequent supervisory feedback (Walker, Churchill and Ford, 1977).

The last source for feedback is from the retail organization itself. The formal organization provides feedback concerning salaries, sales trends, and standard performance goals. With this general information, supervisors can process more relevant departmental information concerning goal achievement and role clarity. Supervisors acting as links with the organization can choose to pass the store-wide information to subordinates or ignore it altogether (Teas 1981).

Feedback is necessary for self-development (Ross 1981). It provides the dynamics of the attribution process, or learning from one's success or failure. However for this to take place, feedback must be made relevant to individuals. This includes being targeted toward established goals as Walker, Churchill, and Ford found in their study with industrial salesmen (1975). With little direct supervision in the retail setting, the primary source of performance feedback is obscured. It would be beneficial to develop the

sales personnel's "self-regulatory system" to react to the performance feedback (Mischel 1973). Here salespeople direct themselves toward established goals, deciding how to obtain these goals. The retail organization itself could publish its feedback in a form that is relevant to those goals. This does not abolish the need for direct supervision, but merely provides a channel for outcome feedback. Cognitive feedback or feedback concerning specific behaviors and their effectiveness in the selling situation will still need to be fulfilled by the supervisory staff.

III. Recognition and Rewards

Rewards are either extrinsic or intrinsic and can be at two levels; system wide or individual level. An extrinsic reward is a tangible object such as money, where as an intrinsic reward is a state of mind like recognition. An example of a system wide extrinsic reward would be insurance benefits, where as at the individual level it would be a large merit increase. Intrinsic rewards that are system wide in orientation could be used to promote a feeling of organizational pride or a feeling of being a "winning team" like feedback on out selling the competition, while at the individual level they could promote a feeling of self-fulfillment like information on out selling fellow workers. (Steers and Porter, 1983). When developing rewards,

whether they be recognition or monetarily based, a critical issue is not emphasizing extrinsic reward orientation. Instead an intrinsic reward orientation is preferred. By being intrinsically oriented, people are likely to examine their failures in hopes of learning from them where as extrinsically oriented people regard failures as due to a lack of effort (Sujan 1986). Ryan, Mims, and Koestner (1983) state a salesperson's intrinsic rewards can be influenced by the money/performance link. This brings about an interesting discussion of the different pay structures in the retail setting. Salespeople paid on a commission basis would be receiving an extrinsic reward. With extrinsic rewards, people tend to believe failure is due to insufficient effort (Sujan 1986; Fiske and Taylor, 1984; Ryan, Mims, and Koestner 1983; Pittman, Emery, Boggicno 1983; Condry and Chamber 1978). However, when salespeople are paid strictly on an hourly basis, this negates the money performance link, motivation would depend solely on intrinsic values cultivated by the supervisor.

Feedback, as well as money, can become a reinforcer when one is trying to increase performance goals (Locke 1978). Positive performance feedback can reinforce behaviors, inducing the employee to repeat the behavior because of its ties to an intrinsic reward orientation. Here salespeople are deciding for themselves how goals are to be met, they are likely to give more attention to the content of their work

thus increasing an intrinsic reward orientation. To study this concept Sujana (1986) devised a questionnaire survey of 880 managers of a large manufacturing company and 4038 salespeople in the areas of automotive, industrial, and medical supplies. Evidence was found supporting this concept.

Feedback from a self management system may act as a reward for performance, and thus a stimulus to either change or continue work habits. Authors argue that feedback is a necessary condition for successful goal setting. In an integration of the literature, Tochinsky and King (1980) found that feedback, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, allows the individual to monitor progress toward goal achievement. It can be argued that any performance feedback operates to establish some level of aspiration within the individual. An individual's knowledge and evaluations are reflected in the goals (level of aspirations) set for a particular task. If individuals are satisfied with their performance, they may attempt only to maintain previous levels of achievement. The critical issue is not that a person has incentives, but rather how such incentives affect aspiration levels, goal acceptance, and commitment. If they are indifferent to an incentive they may take no action at all (Tochinsky and King, 1980).

Communication allows for recognition and achievement because it initiates the evaluation of past efforts. Recognition is an important role in the motivation and control of salespeople. However Locke, Bryan, and Kendall (1968)

discovered that behavior is not affected by incentives of any kind unless they change goals and intentions first. In stating this, Locke, Bryan and Kendall assume individuals' specific goals and intentions are the end results of a mental process and that actual performance is always directed by goals and intentions. They state that the individual must evaluate any external object and estimate the potential value or harm that could come from it. Thus the attribution process between behavior and consequences is always in place. As a result of this, the individual sets a goal toward which to direct behavior while weighing the value of the reward against the perception of the task. Locke (1968) defined incentive as "an event or object external to the individual which can incite action". However, Locke does not support the notion that feedback is not sufficient to motivate performance. Contrary to Locke (1968), Cummings, Schwab, and Rosen (1971), found that knowledge of results was sufficient to motivate performance, while controlling for the differential effects of goal setting. Latham and Yuki (1975), concluded that optimum performance can be achieved only when employees are provided accurate feedback based on clear and published standards. Unfortunately, few studies have manipulated feedback while controlling goal setting. Therefore it is not clear whether feedback has an independent effect on performance.

It is important to note that individual and situational

factors may influence the feedback-effort-performance relationship. However, goal setting clarifies the requirements of the task to be performed. Locke has demonstrated that specific hard goals lead to higher quantitative levels of performance than nonspecific "do your best" goals. In addition, knowing the outcome of previous efforts in relation to goals, individuals appear to set higher goals than might have otherwise been expected. Knowledge of results enable the employee to accept the goals being set as reasonable and attainable, the knowledge also assists with task persistence (Tochinsky and King 1980). Once accepted a higher goal produces greater efforts and leads to improved performance. Goal setting appears to be an effective way of inducing increased efforts over an extended period of time, assuming the goals are realistically set and goal attainment is rewarded.

IV. Obstruction of Feedback

Feedback plays an important role in the success of goal setting efforts. In addition to informing the individual of the behaviors that should be accomplished, feedback provides the individual information about outcomes associated with these behaviors. Tochinsky and King (1980) state in the absence of explicit information about performance, the individual often is left to infer what is desirable behavior.

Inferences whether these outcomes are positive or negative are made as well. Feedback produces an attitude about performance. Then feedback about the attitude instills the desire to act in a certain manner. With feedback, purpose becomes an integral part of processes, attitudes, learning, and adapting (Heaton 1977). However, a salesperson's role is inherently lacking performance feedback. In many instances there is not clear-cut knowledge of the customer's needs or indication that customers are actually interested in products. This is termed feedback obstruction, the existence of structural or interpersonal barriers between the individual and the feedback to be received.

Feedback obstruction occurs when individuals are thwarted from receiving feedback. This obstruction occurs in many different circumstances. New employees are relatively obstructed from self feedback because they have not been able to develop an attribution process for their new setting. Task feedback is when the outcome of the task gives the individual direct information. Obstruction of this strongly relates to anxiety. However jobs vary with the amount of task feedback they provide and the extent to which they can be restructured to provide feedback.

Organizational feedback is general information on how goals are being met. This feedback will be obstructed if information is not timely, and personally relevant. If the performance feedback has been presented in a manner that

individuals can attribute the outcome to something in the environment, as opposed to individual influence, then individuals use discounting cues. Thus feedback has become obstructed due to these cues. In this situation the individual, although receiving much data, receive little feedback that can be used to improve or evaluate performance.

In a study with 89 pharmaceutical sales representatives that answered questionnaires measuring the value of feedback, and feedback obstruction, the percentage that said feedback was important ranged from 45 to 69, while unimportant ranged from 3 to 14. These results suggest that the obstruction of self-feedback and that of supervisory feedback have a direct affect on turnover intent, independent of their affect on the intervening variables of satisfaction and anxiety. Given the strong associations between supervisory feedback obstruction and its affect on anxiety, dissatisfaction, and turnover intent, the supervisor emerges as the employee's primary link to the information environment (Walsh, Ashford, and Hill 1985).

V. Performance

Performance outcomes refer to the actual events resulting from the salesperson's efforts. What constitutes performance is a normative and arbitrary issue. Management sets company and individual goals based in part on sales history, profit

expectations, the ability and experience of the sales staff, competition, and other factors. The salesperson in turn perceives and interprets company goals in terms of individual needs and unique selling situation.

Theories of job performance suggest that three factors affect performance. These are role perceptions, motivation, and ability. Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1977) state salesperson performance pertains also most exclusively to the two factors -- role perceptions and motivation. Role perceptions influence that salesperson's understanding of what activities should be undertaken and how these activities should be performed. Motivation affects the amount of effort expended performing the activities, and ability affects the quality of the effort expended (Bagozzi 1980).

Though hard work undoubtedly is an important determinant of performance, the direction of this effort in many jobs can be even more important (Mitchell 1982 and Ingene 1985). There are three ways salespeople can exhibit their performance once they are motivated. These are persistence, intensity, and choice (Weiner 1980). Salespeople can work harder by working more hours (persistence) or by working more actively during those hours (intensity). Salespeople can work smarter by choosing approaches that are effective for the particular customer (choice). Weiner (1972) identified persistence as one of the principal causes that people use to explain their success and failure. This corresponds with self efficacy

beliefs. This concept states if sufficient effort is produced, successful performance will follow.

The key to having workers who are both productive, and motivated is arousing and maintaining the will to work effectively. Of all of the factors which help to create highly motivated and highly satisfied workers, the principle of recognition appears to be the most important. Effective performance must be recognized and rewarded in what ever terms are meaningful to the individual -- financial, psychological or both (A Work in America Institute Policy Study 1980.)

VI. Productivity

Productivity is the relationship between employment and sales. Even modest improvements in the coverage of the salesforce can translate into large profit increases. When employment is stable or declining the company can enjoy a stable or increased profit. However, when wage increases exceed gains in sales, the dollars produced from employees have become more expensive. The long term effect of declining productivity is disturbing. A drop in productivity means more resources are consumed to produce the same output, or that less output is available to the consumer. Translating this into a retail setting, with a drop in productivity it would take more salespeople to produce the same sales volume. Thus the company spends more on wages while the sales volume

remains constant. To take this one step further, if the company does not increase personnel to maintain the same level of sales, customers may be neglected by the existing personnel due to their decreasing output, translating into decreased customer service (Riggs 1983). This decrease in customer service affects the company as a whole since neglected customers may never return.

With the rising cost in merchandise and labor, retailers are devising creative methods to reduce their expenditures in order to maintain a steady profit. Because the wages of the salesforce occupy a large portion of the retailer's budgets, salesforce performance as related to a productivity ratio is demanding attention.

A productivity ratio is defined as the relationship between the physical outputs and one physical input. When looking at salesforce performance as inputs and outputs, the wages of the employees' become the firm's inputs while the sales volume of the employees' become the outputs. Improving the salesforce performance has potential of decreasing the cost of labor through increasing the amount of sales each employee is contributing to the organization. In this situation the firm would be spending the same amount on wages thus keeping costs stable. However, they would be selling more goods thus improving the productivity of the organization as a whole.

VII. Feedback and Productivity

Selling effectiveness, or labor productivity, is moderated by the nature of the selling environment and the capabilities of the salespeople. In a review of literature Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan (1986) found three characteristics motivating salesperson performance. These are the degree to which salespeople have an intrinsic reward orientation, their tendency to make strategy attributions when analyzing success and failure in their work, and their abilities for effective selling.

When providing feedback to subordinates, the feedback acts as a reinforcement for the behavior performed toward an organizational goal. One can increase productivity using feedback by rewarding or reinforcing behaviors that are tied to the achieving of organizational goals. This ties into the definition of being productive; individuals must be efficient at activities that have value to the organization. It is these activities that must be rewarded. With this view it is conceivable that providing feedback on how activities are being performed could increase productivity.

Achieving efficient score keeping without incurring costs is a major objective. Added costs in another area of the company would defeat the original purpose -- maintain a steady profit. Here it is important to remember that increased administrative costs would increase the inputs of the firm,

counteracting the increase in outputs the firm receives.

Feedback is perhaps the most important use of a productivity measurement. It reinforces success. When productivity improves, everyone involved can see it clearly. Feedback allows the supervisor to confirm improvement and encourage further success. A good system establishes the basis for productivity improvement (National Council of Physical Distribution Management 1978). However, the commitment of the supervisors to the increase of productivity can affect how the salesforce performs. Their verbal and nonverbal communication is important in the salesforce's perception of the program's necessity (Moynahan 1983). Much of the conflict within the salesperson's job could be reduced by more effective communication. It is proposed that attribution processes could come to mediate the feedback relationship between current performance and what is to be expected in the future. The existence of feedback loops lend a sense of dynamics to internal assessments (Lawler 1968). Without communication on performance, employees will be unable to observe whether the environment or their own actions are consistent with past performance, thus negating the attribution process (Sims 1976).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

I. Hypotheses

1. There will be increases in sales between the experimental group and the control group due to feedback presentation.
2. There will be increases in hours between the experimental group and the control group due to feedback presentation.

II. Development of the Instrument

A detailed bi-weekly report was distributed to all department managers. This report stated the departments' regular and overtime hours worked, the total sales, sales per hour, and the selling cost. The year to date, or a running total for category was also included as well as the corresponding figures for the previous year. The individual data on this biweekly report included the employees name, hire data, sales per hour, total sales, regular hours worked, overtime, and their selling cost.

The instrument for group outcome feedback was developed through the use of a computer program named Prox-X-11 of the SAS package. The Prox-X-11 procedure, an adaptation of the Bureau of the Census X-11 seasonal adjustment program, is used to seasonally adjust monthly or quarterly time series data. It creates an output data set containing the adjusted time series, and can handle more than thirty years of data while requiring at least 3 years to be used. The program goes through several steps to reach this outcome. The first step requires the specification of monthly or quarterly data. In steps 2, 3, and 4, the program performs three iterations, each of which provides estimates of the seasonal, trading day, trend cycles and irregular components. Each iteration allows the procedure to make refined estimates of extreme values in the irregular components. After the extreme values are identified and modified, the final estimates of the seasonal component, seasonally adjusted series, trend cycle, and irregular components are produced. During step 2 a moving average is applied to the original data to provide a preliminary estimate of the trend cycle curve. This moving average combines 12 consecutive monthly values, removing

seasonal and irregular variation. The moving average is continually used throughout the rest of the program. Once the graphs were printed, the group outcome feedback instrument was completed by adding the department name, and the store number. Current sales data was added biweekly to the Prox-X-11 program, thus creating new graphic information.

III. Sample

Sales associates and department managers of a Southeastern United States department store chain participated in this study. There were 5 stores within the chain, the sample was pre-selected by including only those departments constant throughout the complete chain. Thus allowing for control over the merchandise mix. All five stores participated by using the Misses department, Juniors department, Young Men's department, Shoe department, Lingerie department, and Cosmetics department in the study. After pre-selection, experimental and control groups were selected at random, allowing for three experimental departments and two

control departments .

IV. Data Collection

The data collection started June 5, 1987 and ended September 3, 1987. During this time the control groups received biweekly individual outcome feedback as in the past, while the experimental groups discontinued the individual feedback and received group outcome feedback. These graphs were generated by collecting the biweekly sales data for the experimental departments and placing it into the Prox-X-11 program. The program then generated new graphs monthly, plotting the new information. Prox-X-11 was unable to produce graphs on a biweekly basis. Once produced these graphs were labeled with the department name and store number. For analysis purposes, information was collected on the control groups as well. However, these groups were unaware of this study.

In addition to sales data, the total hours used in each department, control and experimental, were also graphed monthly. This information was for analysis purposes only, and was not viewed by experimental groups or control groups. Department graphs were distributed to the Assistant Store Manager by the researcher on a biweekly basis. The Assistant Store Manager then distributed the graphs to the department manager. Each department manager used the graphs to

communicate the sales goals established by the store manager to the sales staff. This communication was left to the department managers discretion.

V. Establishing Sales Goals

At the time of this study there were two types of goal systems being used, one with an incentive plan and one without. The Store Manager from each store determined the goals of each department based on his past experience, the past sales of the departments, and the up-coming promotional calendar for the month. Taking all of these into consideration, a monthly quota was set for that department. The monthly quota was then broken down into weekly sales, daily sales, as well as the sales that each individual has to achieve for the department as a whole to reach the goal. The goals were posted as well as verbally depicted. The results were posted continually through the day, and reinforced bi-weekly with the individual or group feedback reports. Every department in the study followed this system.

In addition to this, the shoe department was participating in a department incentive system which followed the above procedure and included an incentive plan based on the achievement of these goals. To qualify for a bonus, this department as a whole had to achieve at least 10 percent difference between their quota and the actual sales total. If

the 10 percent increase was met or surpassed they received a percentage of the difference they achieved. In addition, individual sales clerk contributions to the difference in the sales quota and actual sales totals were measured. This determined the percentage of bonus each sales clerk received. For example, if an individual contributed 22 percent of the department's increase over the quota through individual sales totals, then that salesperson received 22 percent of the bonus.

Chapter IV.

Results and Discussion

I. Personal Attributes

This study was composed of 224 individuals divided between six departments: Juniors, Misses, Young mens, Cosmetics, Shoes, and Lingerie. The personal attributes in this study were age, sex, status of employment, job title, education, and length of service.

While studying the demographics of the sample females were found to dominate the study there were 92 percent of females and 8 percent of males. The most integrated stores were 3 and 5, both of which were higher volume stores, as well as, new or newly remodelled (table 1).

Table 1. Gender by Department and Store.

	Miss		Jrs		YMens		Shoe		Ling		Cosm	
Store	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
1	14	1	8	0	3	0	9	0	6	0	10	1
2	4	0	2	0	0	0	5	0	3	0	3	1
3	12	1	6	0	2	2	20	1	9	1	12	2
4	6	0	3	0	2	0	7	0	4	0	6	0
5	<u>15</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>1</u>
Totals	51	6	25	1	7	2	55	3	28	3	40	5

Typical of the retail environment, staff overturn played a role in the sample. This was determined by looking at the length of service and holding the staff size constant. In 1984 the study started with 224 individuals. During 1984 fifteen percent of the sample was replaced. There was 12 percent replacement in 1985, 21 percent replacement in 1986, and 30 percent replacement in 1987 (table 2). This hampered the attribution process.

Table 2. Length of Service by Department.

Year	Miss	Jrs	YMens	Shoe	Ling	Cosm
1987	13	10	6	21	9	9
1986	16	5	2	14	2	8
1985	6	5	1	6	5	3
1984	9	3	1	9	2	9
1983	3	2	1	3	1	4
1982	0	0	0	2	0	2
Before	<u>8</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>
Totals	55	26	11	58	29	45

When pairing percentages between attributes it was found that turnover, age, status of employment, and education have similar trends. There was a 51 percent turnover rate within the first two years of employment. The ages of 16-25 were held by 44 percent of the staff, while 53 percent of the staff was considered strictly sales positions. The educational levels indicated that 68 percent of the individuals were

receiving some form of education: 25 percent at the high school level and 43 percent at the college level.

The trend in turnover and status can be attributed to age and education. Retail sales positions can be easily obtained at a young age and with little or no work experience. The hours of employment make it ideal for students at all educational levels. Once desired educational degrees are achieved, salespeople leave retail for other environments. With their schedules limited by educational course work, they are not typically promoted to supervisory positions. Surprisingly this sample did not have individuals with only a high school education (table 3).

Table 3. Educational Level by Department.

Level	Miss	Jrs	YMens	Shoe	Ling	Cosm	Totals
No Hs Di	14	3	4	14	5	6	46
Hs Di	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hs +	29	18	3	22	13	33	118
Jc Di	8	1	0	6	3	10	28
C Di	8	1	2	12	6	6	35
C +	2	0	0	2	1	3	8

This raises a question concerning turnover, it is proposed that the 51 percent turnover rate is due to 16-18 yearolds terminating employment upon graduation from high school. These individuals begin careers in other industries or continue their education at colleges and universities

outside the area (table 4).

Table 4. Age by Department.

Age	Miss	Jrs	YMens	Shoe	Ling	Cosm	Totals
16 - 25	21	22	9	37	8	13	110
26 - 40	15	4	0	8	8	19	54
41 - 55	12	0	0	8	4	11	35
56 - above	6	0	0	5	11	3	25

There was a distinction made between job title and status of employment (table 5). Job title differentiates the levels of control between the individuals. Job status dictates the types of work the individuals are responsible for. When looking at job title there were several departments that did not have a manager designated to them. It was common for a manager to be responsible for several departments in the same geographical location in the store. These managers delegate departmental work to hourly employees and follow through on the results. The percentage of managers to salespeople is similar throughout the departments excluding cosmetics.

Table 5. Comparison of Status and Job Title Ratios by Department.

Ratio	Miss	Jrs	YMens	Shoe	Ling	Cosm	Totals
Job Title							
Sales/Mgt	49/8	23/3	6/1	54/3	29/3	44/1	205/19
Status							
Sales/Suprvy	29/25	10/16	4/5	22/34	17/17	38/7	120/104

The cosmetics department management staff was 2 percent of their total employees. This was due to department leasing. These areas were not owned by the department store therefore, the majority of the managers were located at each cosmetic firm.

When comparing job title to status the ratio between sales and supervision in the cosmetic department held constant. However, in the other five departments the supervisory positions and sales positions were close to a one to one ratio. These supervisory positions implement the departmental managers decisions and have little control on the decision making process. The sales positions in the status of employment section were typically part-time employees. These employees were responsible for customer service and very little non-selling work. Their guidance was typically from the supervisory positions within their area.

Three differences were found in the personal attributes after viewing the two types of goal setting. The shoe department represented the commission type of goal setting. This department was composed of 64 percent 16-25 yearolds while the total sample was 49 percent. There was also a higher turnover rate of 60 percent compared to a sample total of 51 percent. The third difference was a lower percentage of supervisors to store totals and a higher percentage of department managers. It is unknown whether the store developed this goal setting technique to decrease turnover and

compensate for a shortage of supervisors, or if these occurrences are the results of the commission based system.

II. Results

To analyze both hypotheses a one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was completed. A 95 percent confidence level was set. Hypothesis I tested differences between the increase of sales of the experimental groups and control groups due to feedback manipulation. After the analysis of variance of this hypothesis was completed, the F value was found to be .1095. Therefore the hypotheses was rejected and no significant differences between the groups were found. In the analysis of the second hypothesis a one way ANOVA was also completed. This hypothesis tested differences between the experimental and control groups would not differ in their increases in hours used as a result of feedback manipulation. This hypotheses was also rejected with a F value of 0.9282 verifying no differences between groups.

Due to a small sample size, analysis of individual departments was not possible. A sample of 5 department stores did not allow for an analysis of variance between the 5 like departments through the chain. Therefore it is unknown if certain experimental groups were affected while other experimental grouped remained constant.

The length of time in which the experiment was conducted

hampered statistical analysis as well. Having used a three month experimental process limited the analysis of this study. Even though the Prox-X-11 process was to account for seasonal or market trends it is more effective over a longer period of time and more difficult to isolate the effect of feedback with market trends.

III. Discussion

Although both hypotheses were rejected, insights on feedback manipulation and affecting variables were made during this research. One main revelation was the vagueness concerning the Prox-X-11 program. This program was designed to rid seasonality from retail data. Thus creating a trend line in which one can view the overall economic welfare of the company. However, these seasonal factors were also laden with business changes. By viewing all the sales graphs the affect of market competition can be seen. In July of 1984, a new mall was introduced into the area. The existing malls showed sharp declines even through Christmas where the new mall showed steady increases for up to a year and a half (figure 2).

The Prox-X-11 program gave a graphic presentation to productivity ratios. When looking for a stable productivity ratio the increase and decrease in hours should mirror the increase decrease in sales. One can see a declining

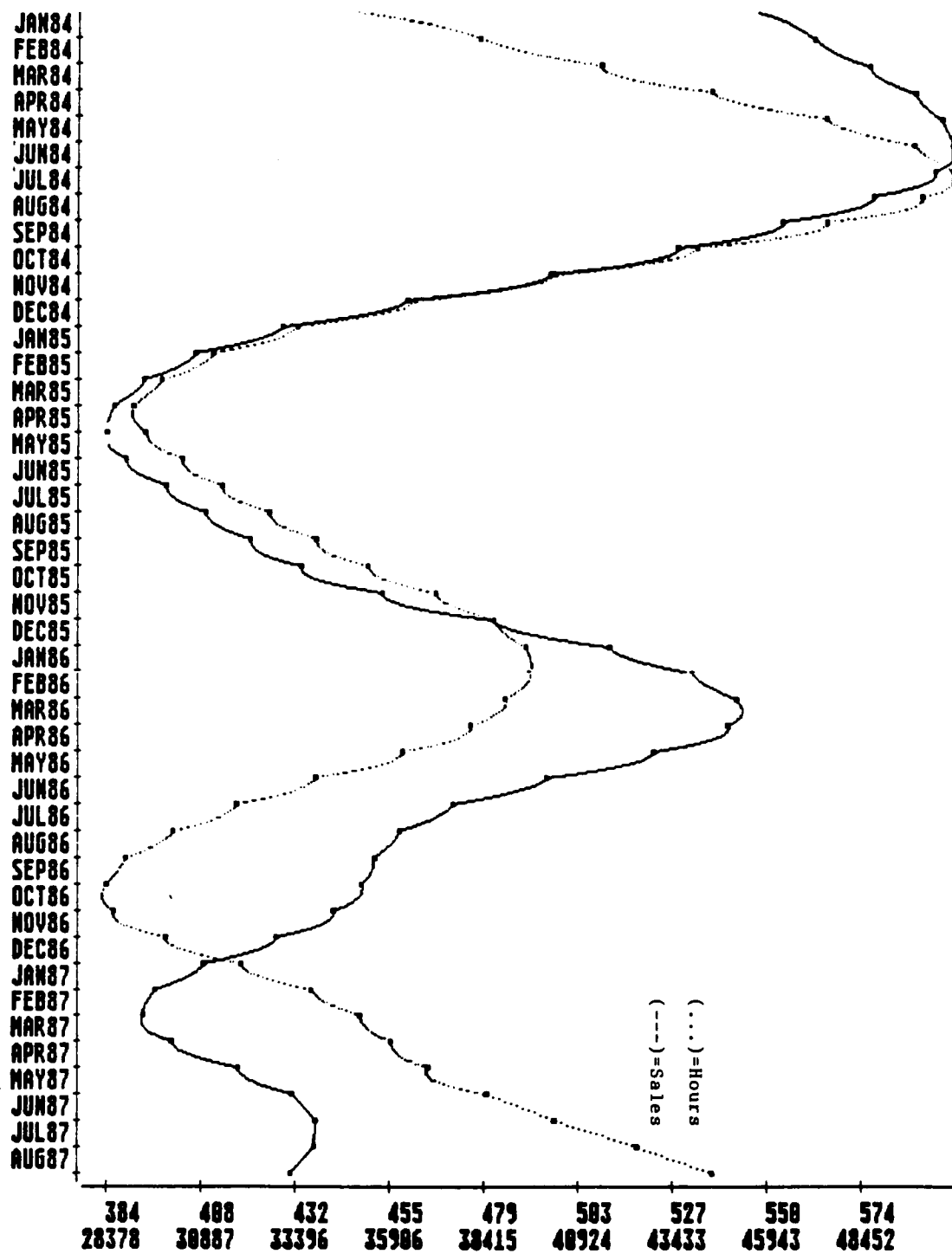


Figure 2. Market Competition

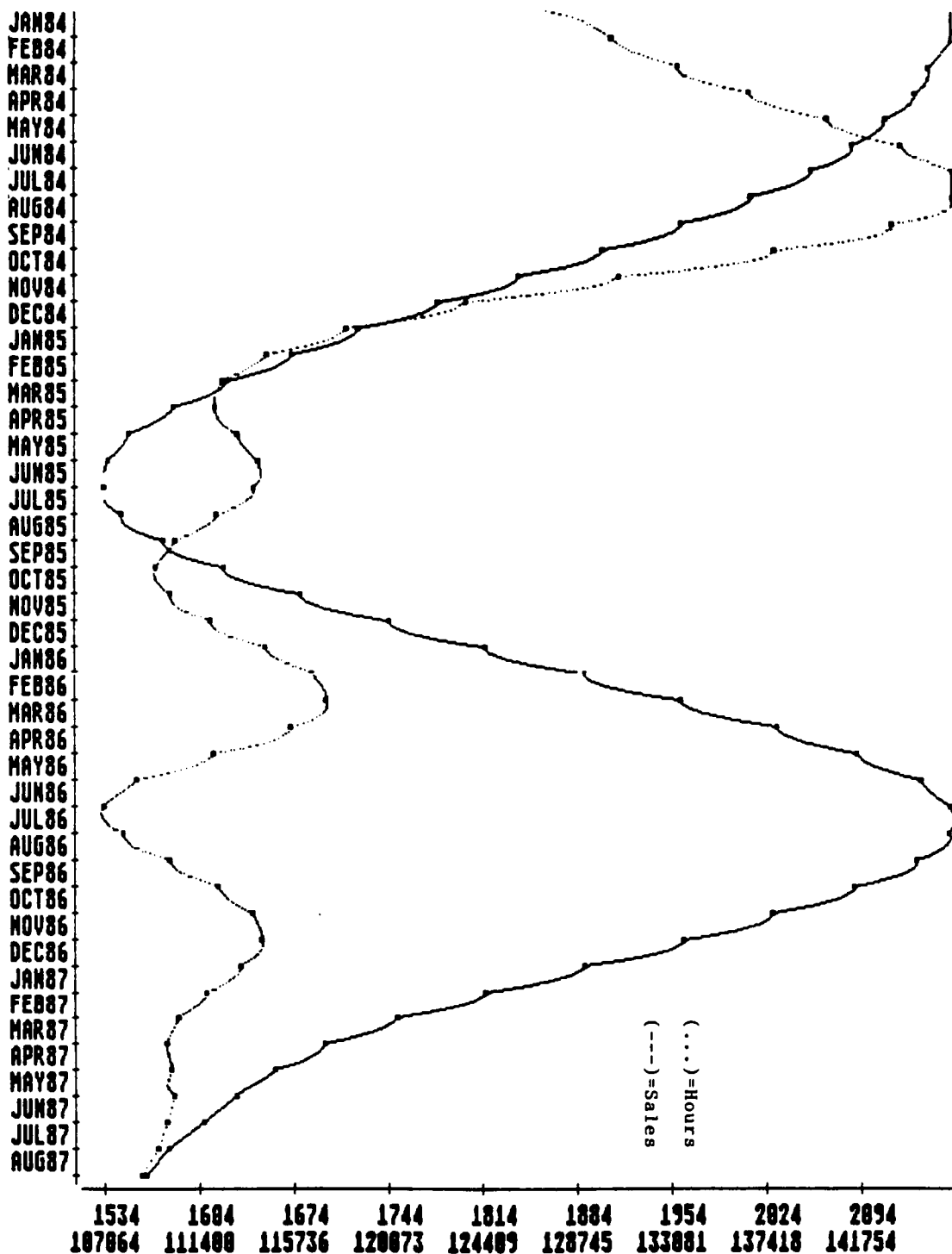


Figure 3. Management Influence

productivity ratio if the hours have increased or remained the same on the graph when the corresponding sales have decreased or remained the same. These shifts in productivity can be results of the economic environment or management influence. For example when viewing the hours of store 1 Department 8222 (figure 3). The increases and decrease only mirror the sales during the experimental months of this study. This could be a result of a department manager not realizing cost of labor in relation to sales. Store 3 is a good example of a environmental situation influencing productivity. During the construction period, Departments 8222, 8250, and 8244 wages could not decrease enough to compensate for their loss in sales. This can be seen in figure 4. It is important to note that managerial influence as well as environmental influence can affect the ratio of inputs to outputs.

As Moynahan (1983) stated, commitment from supervisors to any program is a necessity. Their verbal and nonverbal communication can denounce the best communication plan. To increase the importance of the Moynahan study, verbal and nonverbal support can not be controlled in a experimental study, let alone a retail setting. For example although specific graph placements were designated, several occasions graphs were found in other areas. When inquiring about this, the graphs in question were placed where the old communication system had been and these placements were left up to the managers to dictate.

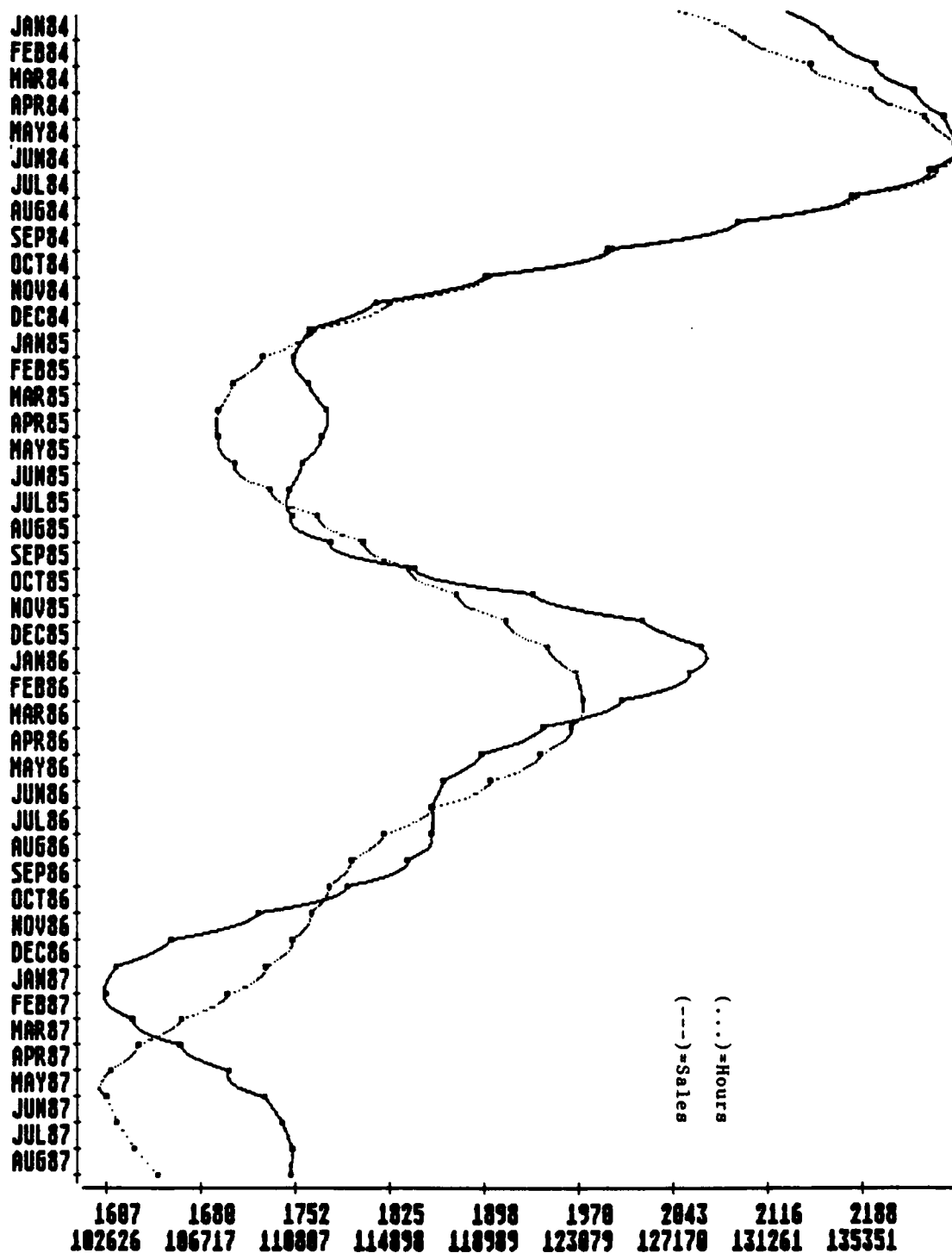


Figure 4. Environmental Influence

Supervisory support for organizational decisions is important. They can misrepresent company standards to their liking. As Teas (1981) stated they can withhold information from employees. If not supervised themselves, department managers can ignore business environments therefore not making necessary changes. Department managers also have the responsibility of providing feedback to their staff. If they are not attentive of these needs, the intrinsic motivation of the sales staff could go untapped (Steer and Porter 1983). When the group is the correct size, group feedback should promote interpersonal communication as well as an individual attribution process. Teas and McElory (1986) state once a performance pattern has been established the attribution process will begin if new performances do not meet the pattern. However as stated in the beginning, retail salespeople often work alone, therefore interpersonal communication and social pressures could be at a minimum. This could hamper the attribution process of the conceptual model. Although the typical retail department's size should allow for this to happen, the individual group member can lack supervision and communication with co-workers, limiting the attribution process due to feedback obstruction. Employees may also lack attribution of their performance for another reason. The graphic communication had been plotted for three years prior to the experimental months. With the high turn over in the retail environment, only 44 percent of the

employees from those years were still present. The three year data may not have elicited an attribution process for the experimental employees because for the most part it was not their past performance.

During a critique of the graphic communication given to the experimental groups, one item could have been included to increase this the effectiveness of graphic communication. In addition to the single department data being plotted, on the same graph the average sales for total department company-wide could have been plotted. Analysis as to whether their sales were above or below the average of the like groups could have motivated performance to a greater degree. As Locke, Bryan, and Kendall stated (1968) performance will not change if the mental process of attributing performance with end results is not triggered. Although supervisory and co worker feedback obstruction can not be controlled at the retail setting without incurring cost, redesigning graphic communication may instill an attribution process. It is proposed that graphic communication should be distributed to department supervisors as opposed to department managers. The supervisors have direct control over selling performance of salespeople where as department managers exercise direct control over other management functions.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Summary

Increasing salesforce productivity is a major concern to retailers. By keeping labor costs down and increasing sales a stable profit can be maintained. Presently graphic communication has been an untapped area in this field. Therefore this study was undertaken to determine if performance feedback can elicit selling motivation. A conceptual framework was developed from three theories. Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan's (1986) framework of selling; Churchill and Ford's (1977) concepts of strategy and effort; and Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor's (1979) interworkings of feedback were combined into a conceptual model of salesforce performance.

The following areas were discussed in the model and through out the study:

1. Out Come Feedback. The degree to which individuals receive unmanipulated sales data.
2. Cognitive Feedback. The degree to which individuals receive descriptive sales data.
3. Personal Attributes. The characteristics of sex, age, status of employment, job title, length of service, and

education.

4. Attribution Process. The instigation of a thought process concerning behavior and results from performance.

5. Productivity Ratio. The relationship between employment and sales achieved from their efforts.

The sample consisted of 244 salespeople and department managers from a southeastern department store. There were five stores within the chain. The sample included departments common throughout the chain.

Graphic communication was produced by using the computer program Prox-X-11, part of the SAS package. It is an adaptation of the Bureau of the Census X-11 seasonal adjustment program. It creates output containing an adjusted time series, screening for seasonality.

The first objective of this study was to determine the difference of increase in sales between experimental and control groups due to feedback manipulation. By using an analysis of variance, graphic feedback manipulation was not found to increase sales.

The last objective was to determine if hours increased in either experimental or control groups due to graphic feedback manipulation. Here again an analysis of variance proved any change to be insignificant.

Insights concerning feedback use and analysis were gained. The small sample size and length of time the experiment was conducted was felt to affect the results of

this study. Although the Prox-X-11 program could not adjust for the economic influences of the sample it did provide for some observations concerning managerial influence.

It is yet undetermined if performance feedback communicated graphically can elicit an attribution process for behavior modification. Feedback obstruction may have taken place by communicating single department totals. An attribution concerning performance may have taken place if each department had information on their like departments through out the chain.

II. Recommendations

This study was built upon the theories of performance and attribution. Graphic communication of sales data may have proved to elicit an attribution process if the following suggestions were observed.

1. A larger sample would allow for analysis between departments.
2. Conducting the experiment for a longer time period would help determine environmental influences.
3. Include sales data from like departments to help employees attribute their performance and negate feedback obstruction.
4. Distribute graphic communication to department supervisors or individuals holding positions directly above salespeople.

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