

The influence of an optimal control system on salesperson performance and championing



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ABSTRACT

In this study, the effect of a deviation from an optimally blended control system on salesperson performance and championing is investigated. Blended control systems represent combinations of many different forms of control, affording sales managers the opportunity to better match a control system with the overall context in which their firm operates, addressing such things as current salesperson, firm, and environmental variables. The extent to which the blended system represents an appropriate match with the overall context, however, is of primary concern. As demonstrated here, deviations from optimal control negatively affect both individual salesperson performance, as well as salesperson championing. In combination, these findings emphasize the importance of understanding a broader picture of salesperson control than is allowed through simple direct effect analysis.

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1. Introduction

Effective organizational management requires careful consideration of many interconnected elements of strategy (e.g., Walker & Ruekert, 1987). It is impossible to fully understand the outcomes that a given strategic decision holds for an organization, without an understanding of all the variables at play (Slater & Olsen, 2000; Vorhies & Morgan, 2003). We argue that, in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of sales strategy, it is necessary to examine relationships between many variables simultaneously.

For instance, control systems are one of the most important determinants of the effective management of salespeople. The influence of control on employee job tension and job satisfaction (e.g., Jaworski & Kohli, 1991; Ramaswami, 1996), teamwork and adaptive selling (e.g., Baldauf, Cravens, & Piercy, 2001; Oliver & Anderson, 1994), expertise and competence (e.g., Cravens, Ingram, LaForge, & Young, 1993; Oliver & Anderson, 1994), motivation and performance (e.g., Cravens et al., 1993; Oliver & Anderson, 1994) has been studied extensively. However, much of this research has taken a piecemeal approach studying the relationship between control systems (e.g., behavioral and output) and performance.

In this study, we question the plausibility that control systems exert a direct effect on performance. One of the main weaknesses of previous control studies is they examine one or two variables in isolation. Given the complex nature of the organizational environment, it is more likely that a host of interconnected variables influence the relationship between the control system and performance (Oliver & Anderson, 1995).

Along these lines, we extend existing knowledge of the relationship between managerial sales control and individual performance by taking a holistic approach. Our approach accounts for the influence of multiple moderators of the relationship between control and the outcome variables. In particular, our investigation focuses on how well a control system fits with individual, firm, and environmental characteristics, and how the subsequent fit (or misfit) affects outcomes. As such, fit is conceptualized as the contextual appropriateness of a control system. We assume that a particular managerial control system will be most successful when it fits with other variables (e.g., salesperson past experience, market turbulence, product complexity, managerial empowerment strategy, and selling strategy).

2. Configuration theory

To assess control system fit, we use configuration theory. Configuration theory suggests that for each set of strategic characteristics (in this case, control strategy) there exists an optimal set of organizational characteristics that yields the highest performance (Van de Ven & Drazin, 1985). The optimal configurations best represent complex “gestalts” of multiple, interconnected, and mutually reinforcing characteristics that enable the firm to achieve its strategic goals (Vorhies & Morgan, 2003, p. 201). Consistent with this, we take a holistic approach via the identification of gestalts, or optimal configurations, rather than a typical moderation or interaction approach where the effects of only one, or occasionally two, individual moderators are observed. As such, a configuration approach enables us to evaluate fit in terms of many variables simultaneously, rather than just the few feasible with moderation.

Applying configuration theory, we study the effect of the optimal configuration between control and relevant individual, firm,

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and environmental characteristics on two important outcome measures (i.e., individual performance and championing). We focus on individual sales performance and championing for several reasons. First, the primary role of sales management is to drive sales performance (Cron & Levy, 1987). With increased competition, the pressure for salespeople to perform at a high level has intensified. Thus, understanding the relationship between sales management practices like control strategy and performance is essential. Furthermore, increased competition has heightened the need for organizations to continuously evolve and innovate. The significance of formal planning has changed (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1996). In order for effective organizational change to take place, organizational champions (i.e., individuals who persuasively communicate proposals or new ideas within the organization) are essential. Salespeople are well suited to fill the role of organizational champions because they are positioned between management and customers. Salespeople have access to important customer information that could potentially enhance organizational change. Understanding the relationship between sales management control and the likelihood that salespeople will step up and effectively act as champions is important.

To summarize, we employ insights from configuration theory and the control systems literature to consider the relationship between control strategy, individual, firm, and environmental characteristics and its effect on salesperson performance and championing. In Fig. 1, we provide a conceptual model that depicts the importance of fitting control strategy to these other characteristics.

In the remaining sections, we describe the process followed to assess fit. Then, we develop hypotheses and present our empirical study. Finally, we discuss results and offer conclusions and directions for future research.

3. Conceptual development and hypotheses

3.1. Description of the process followed to assess fit

A large number of past studies have evaluated holistic relationships between multidimensional phenomena (i.e., researchers have studied the match, congruence, or fit between numerous constructs and the resultant relationship to a dependent variable). The approach for analyzing such phenomena has varied from study to study. Venkatraman (1989) categorized these approaches in terms of

the degree of specificity of the functional form of the fit-based relationship (i.e., high versus low specificity) relative to the number of variables in the fit equation. Venkatraman recommends a particular analytical approach for each category derived on these bases. For instance, if the degree of form specificity is high and few variables are to be included in the equation, *moderation* is the recommended analytical approach to study the effect of fit on a given criterion variable (e.g., performance). However, when many variables are to be included in the fit equation, the researcher will have to decrease the level of specificity. When fit among multiple variables is considered simultaneously and its impact on criterion variables is being investigated, fit should be conceptualized and assessed via *profile deviation*, whereby deviation is the difference between the characteristics represented in the optimal case versus the remaining cases (Venkatraman, 1989). Thus, in our case, fit is operationalized as the degree to which the firm's profile (across a number of individual, firm, and environmental characteristics) differs from that of the optimal organization that has been identified as a superior performer.

Taking a configuration theory approach requires the considerate selection of the characteristics to be used to calibrate the optimal profile as well as the identification of high performers. According to the literature, the optimal profile may be identified either theoretically or empirically (e.g., Venkatraman, 1990); however, it is often unlikely that the past literature supports the assessment of this theoretically. Therefore, it is common to approach the identification of the profile empirically. Thus, in our study, this approach requires (1) the identification of cases with high performing firms implementing a given control strategy, (2) the identification of characteristics with which fit to control strategy will be important, and (3) the calibration of the important characteristics of the high performers as the optimal against which others will be measured (see Venkatraman & Prescott, 1990 for a detailed review of these steps).

3.2. Determination of the characteristics to be included in the profile

We initially measured a number of characteristics for possible inclusion in our profile. As noted, these characteristics came from three broad categories: 1) individual (i.e., age and past sales experience), 2) firm (i.e., relationship selling strategy, empowerment strategy, and

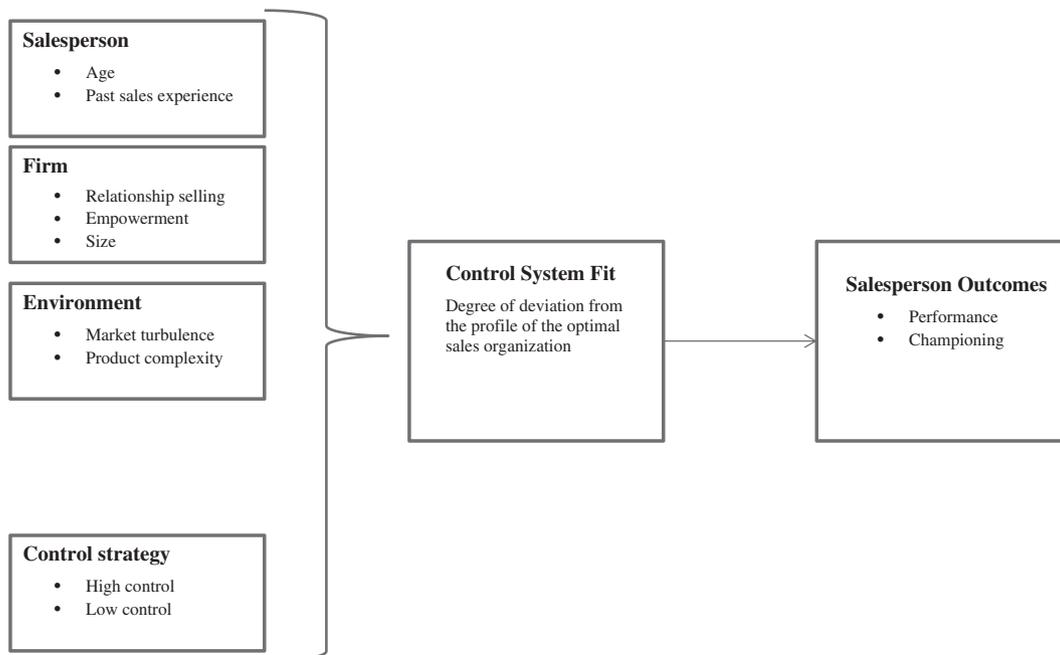


Fig. 1. The effect of sales control strategy fit with salesperson, firm and environmental characteristics on salesperson outcomes.

firm size), and 3) environmental (i.e., market turbulence and product complexity). We elected to study these particular characteristics because their relevance has been established in the literature. For example, past sales experience (Kimberly & Evanisko, 1981), empowerment (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996), selling strategy (Wagner, Klein, & Keith, 2001), market turbulence (Slater & Olsen, 2000), and product complexity (Slater & Olsen, 2000) have all been shown to influence various components of individual performance. For a listing of sample articles, please refer to Table 1. Using these factors as a starting point, we empirically determined those that significantly moderate the relationship between control and performance and included those when deriving the optimal profile. Notably, age and firm size did not have a significant effect and were dropped from the analysis. Please refer to Table 1 for a list of characteristics included in the profile analysis along with sample references from the sales literature that support the relevance of each characteristic.

3.3. Hybrid control systems

Historically, control systems research focused on several distinct forms of control such as behavior or output control. More recent research, however, calls for the consideration of control combinations. Rather than viewing control as a simple behavior versus output dichotomy, research evaluating the influence of various control combinations (a.k.a. hybrid control systems) on performance outcomes (e.g., Babakus, Cravens, Grant, Ingram, & Laforge, 1996; Oliver & Anderson, 1995) is essential. In general, researchers agree that studying combinations of controls provides a more realistic assessment of the managerial controls witnessed in practice. Consistent with these emergent research streams (e.g., Babakus et al., 1996; Cravens, Lassk, Low, Marshall, & Moncrief, 2004; Jaworski, Stathakopoulos, & Krishnan, 1993; Oliver & Anderson, 1995), we treat control as a hybrid blend, rather than a single dimension (behavior, output, self, social, cultural, etc.).

3.4. Control fit and sales performance

Configuration theory suggests that an organization that resembles its optimal type will be most effective. Increased effectiveness will result from internal consistency (i.e., fit) among the patterns of relevant factors or characteristics of the organization, task, etc. (e.g., Doty, Glick, & Huber, 1993). Embedded within this theory is the assumption of equifinality, or the belief that multiple organizations can achieve the same level of effectiveness via a variety of paths (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Thus, a given control strategy is not superior to another in and of itself. Instead, it is the holistic fit between control and multiple other relevant characteristics (i.e., the gestalt) that drives superior effectiveness. In this case, we expect that sales performance, defined as the salesperson's

achievement of both quantity and quality sales objectives (e.g., Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Sujan, Weitz, & Kumar, 1994), will be greater when the control profile for a particular salesperson is closer to that of the optimal for his/her control type.

H1. Deviation from the optimal control profile will have a negative influence on individual sales performance.

3.5. Control fit and championing

Consistent with past research, we define championing as a form of upward influence that involves “the persistent and persuasive communication of proposals that either provide the firm with new capabilities or allow the firm to use existing capabilities differently” (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 1996, p. 55). Champions are valuable to organizations in that they are often able to mobilize company resources, generate momentum for a strategy (Noble & Mokwa, 1999), and spur on organizational innovation (Howell & Higgins, 1990). As a result, top managers have begun to recognize the importance of champions in the work force.

We propose that the more similar a salesperson's control profile is to that of the optimal for his/her control type, the more likely he/she will be to emerge as a champion. Prior research acknowledges that effective championing requires a climate of support on the behalf of management (Howell & Higgins, 1990). In order for a salesperson to emerge as an effective champion, the situation must be one in which the salesperson is comfortable taking a risk. If there is a lack of fit perceived in the existing managerial setting, then the likelihood of the salesperson engaging in championing is expected to decrease.

H2. Deviation from the optimal control profile will have a negative influence on championing.

4. Research methods

4.1. Sample and data acquisition

Data were obtained from sales organizations operating in the healthcare sector. Contact information for the organizations was obtained from a national (US) list. A random sample of the firms was contacted via initial telephone calls. In the phone conversations, we introduced the study to sales managers, determined whether participation was feasible and generated support from the sales managers. Interested sales managers (one per firm) were mailed an instruction packet, a cover letter, a questionnaire for the supervisor to complete, and a questionnaire for a salesperson to complete. Supervisors were asked to distribute the salesperson questionnaire to the next salesperson with whom they had contact (in order to ensure random selection). One potential concern is that the sales manager would tend to select a higher performing salesperson to complete the questionnaire. However, the mean score (3.53 out of 5) and the amount of variance for the performance measure seem to indicate that this was not a major problem. Questionnaires were to be returned separately. The supervisor questionnaire included measures of the firm's market turbulence, product complexity, empowerment strategy, and selling strategy. In addition, supervisors completed a measure of the salesperson's performance, and participation in championing activities. These rankings were matched with the responses from the corresponding salesperson. The salesperson questionnaire included measures of control as well as a host of demographic and background information including prior sales experience, level of education, and age. Business reply envelopes were attached to each questionnaire. Questionnaires were coded to allow for the matching of salespeople to supervisor, as well as back to the master list of companies. Follow-up packets were sent to the non-respondents two months after the initial mailing.

Table 1

Supporting references for individual, firm, and environmental characteristics included in the profile analysis.

Characteristic	Supporting references
Past selling experience	Bartkus, Peterson, and Bellenger (1989) Behrman and Perreault (1984) Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1977)
Empowerment	Anderson and Huang (2006) Conger and Kanungo (1988) Hartline and Ferrell (1996) Martin and Bush (2003)
Selling strategy	Brock and Barclay (1999) Guenzi (2003)
Market turbulence	Heide and Miner (1992) Eisenhardt (1989) Slater and Olsen (2000) Vaaler and McNamara (2004)
Product complexity	Lancaster (1990) Slater and Olsen (2000)

Of 550 firms expressing interest and pre-qualifying for participation, 142 dyads were received from the first wave of data collection and 16 were received from the second wave resulting in a total of 158 matched (approximately 29% response rate). Of the 158 dyads, 98 were obtained from pharmaceutical sales companies, while the remaining 60 were from firms selling proprietaries/sundries within healthcare industry. A test of differences between the groups across study variables exhibited no significant differences, thus warranting the pooling of these responses. A summary of salesperson characteristics follows: average total income = \$103,000, average age = 35, 51% male, average length of relationship with current supervisor = 3 years, and 75% hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

To test for nonresponse bias we compared responses from the first wave against those from the second wave (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). No significant differences were determined for the variables in the study. Comparisons of firm size across respondents and nonrespondents indicated no significant differences. Additionally, the demographic profile (age, length of tenure in the firm) of salespersons included in the sample closely mirrors industry averages. As a result, we conclude that nonresponse did not pose a real problem.

4.2. Measures

Preexisting measures that have been found to be valid and reliable in past research were used for all constructs. Where necessary the measures were adapted slightly in wording to fit the context of the current study. Of the measures completed by the salespeople, most were 7-point Likert-type multi-item scales. These included Ramaswami's (1996) five-item measure of output control, four-item measure of process control, four-item measure of self-control, and five-item measure of professional control. Past selling experience was measured via self-report in number of years working in sales. Other background variables, including age, sex, and total income, were collected as well. These variables, however, did not have a significant effect and were dropped from future analyses.

Supervisors reported on salesperson performance using the Sujan et al.'s (1994) six-item measure and salesperson participation in championing activities using Floyd and Wooldridge's (1992) four-item measure. Market turbulence and product complexity were measured using Slater and Olsen's (2000) scales. Items for empowerment were adapted from Hartline and Ferrell (1996), and items for selling strategy were adapted from Heide and Miner (1992). Firm size was also provided by the supervisor.

5. Analyses and results

To verify the psychometric properties of the measures, we used confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs). We estimated three submodels. The first model included the four control measures obtained from the salesperson. The second model included performance and championing. The third model included the remaining characteristics. Fit indices (presented in Appendix A) indicate adequate fit for all models. Standardized item loadings are presented in the Appendix A. Cronbach's alpha also met or exceeded minimally acceptable standards. Descriptive statistics are provided in Table 2.

5.1. Cluster analysis

Prior to testing the hypotheses, it is necessary to assess the types of control systems that salespeople are witnessing within their work setting. We used cluster analysis to classify salespeople into groups with respect to the patterns of process, output, self, and professional control reported. A two-step approach was used. First, hierarchical clustering was conducted to identify the number of clusters. Second, the cluster centers identified were used as starting seeds in a K-means nonhierarchical clustering procedure. The cluster analysis results suggest that the salespeople in our sample can be classified into two clusters, which represent a high control cluster and a low control cluster. Thus, salespeople saw the control exerted as either high or low across all types of control (i.e., process, output, self, and professional). The data did not indicate that salespeople witnessed bureaucratic or clan control

Table 2
Descriptive statistics.

	AGE	EXP	PROC	OUTPUT	SELF	PROF	PRDCOMP	MKTUR	RELSEL	EMPOW	NOEMP	CHAMP	IPERF
AGE													
EXP	.809**												
PROCESS	-.061	-.127											
OUTPUT	.004	.040	.582**										
SELF	.312**	.283**	.392**	.437**									
PROF	.287**	.279**	.448**	.478**	.689**								
PRDCOMP	.045	.160	.102	.363**	.240*	.251**							
MKTUR	.109	.049	.134	.022	.007	.006	-.045						
RELSEL	.096	.054	.138	.167	.152	.111	.102	.110					
EMPOW	.093	.246**	-.035	.394**	.235*	.221*	.319**	-.038	.192*				
NOEMP	.050	-.051	.093	.088	-.009	.109	.021	.126	.078	.092			
CHAMPION	.114	.160	.141	.121	.284**	.071	.217*	.216*	.182*	.084	.119		
IPERF	.155	.165	.146	.130	.328**	.275**	.065	.275**	.079	.020	-.037	.521**	
Mean	37.205	2.879	4.580	4.911	4.923	5.037	4.381	4.639	5.353	5.354	659.779	3.038	3.526
Standard deviation	10.832	1.588	1.379	1.684	1.118	1.544	1.014	1.330	1.134	.834	2460.877	1.022	.717

AGE = Age.
 EXP = Experience.
 PROC = Process control.
 OUTPUT = Output control.
 SELF = Self control.
 PROF = Professional control.
 PRDCOMP = Product complexity.
 MKTUR = Market turbulence.
 RELSEL = Selling strategy.
 EMPOW = Empowerment.
 NOEMP = Number of employees.
 CHAMPION = Championing.
 IPERF = Individual performance.
 ** p < .01.
 * p < .05.

systems. As a result, in our study we consider two hybrid control systems (high control system and low control system). Table 3 presents the cluster means.

5.2. Profile deviation analysis

To test the configuration theory hypotheses, we began by standardizing the data to ensure that the effects of different measurement units were removed. Next, we identified an optimal control profile in which the control clusters (i.e., high control and low control) were “fitted” to the various individual, environmental, and firm factors. To do so, we first identified the top performing salespeople of each control cluster, and then calibrated the individual, environmental, and firm factors of these performers as the optimal control profiles. This process is consistent with prior profile deviation studies (e.g., Doty et al., 1993; Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985; Venkatraman, 1990; Vorhies & Morgan, 2003).

To select the appropriate number of top performers to use for calibration, we examined the data (Vorhies & Morgan, 2003). We noted a drop-off in performance after the top nine performers in the high control cluster and the top five performers in the low control cluster. Thus, we selected these cases to use in calibrating the optimal control profile. To avoid bias, we also removed the bottom nine performers in the high control cluster and the bottom five performers in the low control cluster (Venkatraman, 1990).

Next, we calculated the mean scores of the top sales performers for each control cluster on the following variables: sales experience, product complexity, market turbulence, relationship selling, and empowerment. Salesperson age and firm size were initially considered, however, neither variable had a significant effect on performance and were dropped. Thus, standardized, mean scores along the significant ($p < .05$) variables only were calculated. For the remaining cases, we calculated the Euclidean distance of each salesperson from the optimal control profile for his/her control type:

$$Dist = \sqrt{\sum_j^N (X_{sj} - \bar{X}_{ij})^2},$$

where

- X_{sj} = the score for a case in the sample on the j th dimension,
- \bar{X}_{ij} = the mean for the ideal control profile along the j th dimension, and
- j = the number of profile dimensions (1, 2, ..., 5).

The result is a profile deviation score that represents the extent to which the profile of each salesperson is similar to the optimal profile for its control cluster. This score was then used to test the relationship between deviation from the optimal control profile and individual sales performance and salesperson championing.

5.3. Hypotheses tests

To test H1, we regressed deviation from the optimal control profile on individual performance. To test H2, we repeated this procedure using championing instead of performance. As expected,

Table 3
Cluster means of the final nonhierarchical clustering solution.

Cluster number	Size	Cluster name	Cluster means			
			Process	Output	Self	Professional
1	95	High	5.13	5.77	5.57	5.78
2	55	Low	3.42	3.73	3.84	3.40

Table 4
Analysis of main effect of ideal control profile deviation on sales performance and championing.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	
	Sales performance	Championing
<i>High control cluster n = 92</i>		
Profile deviation	−2.11*	−2.21*
R ²	.04	.03
F-value	2.33	2.36
<i>Low control cluster n = 55</i>		
Profile deviation	−2.01*	−2.88**
R ²	.05	.16
F-value	2.03	8.31**
<i>Full sample n = 147</i>		
Profile deviation	−3.45**	−3.61**
R ²	.09	.10
F-value	5.94**	13.02**

** $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$.

the relationship between deviation and both performance and championing was negative and significant for each cluster as well as the full sample (refer to Table 4). Following the procedure outlined by Venkatraman (1989) and Vorhies and Morgan (2003), we assessed the power of the hypotheses tests by comparing the regression models containing deviation from the optimal control profile with regression models containing deviation from a random “nonoptimal” baseline. We randomly selected cases from each control cluster in which fit with the variables used in calibrating the profile was unknown, calculated deviation from this profile for the remaining cases, and substituted these deviations for the optimal deviations in the prior regression equations. Results indicated that deviation from the random “nonoptimal” was not significant.

To further validate our tests, we checked for the assumption inherent within configuration theory predictions that either control cluster must be capable of leading to superior performance. That is, we checked that performance variations between the salespeople were not the result of a main effect of control type (i.e., high versus low). The results of our analysis of variance test revealed no significant relationship between control cluster and sales performance ($F = 1.95$, d.f. = 1, $p = .164$, means 3.66 vs. 3.46).

6. Discussion

This paper addressed the impact of the coalignment of the company's control strategy, business environment, selling strategy and employee's level of past sales experience on the salesperson's level of performance and championing. In accomplishing this, we have combined two emergent themes in control research. Our research does not run counter to existing sales control knowledge, but instead builds on it by applying a method enabling the evaluation of a more complex system of moderating factors. Namely, we have investigated the effect of hybrid control systems as well as the effects of multiple moderating conditions on the outcomes of control.

To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to empirically evaluate the patterns of factors surrounding effective control strategies by taking a holistic approach, rather than focusing on main effects or limited two- or three-way interaction effects. Data from the study support our hypotheses. We demonstrate that it is in fact the fit of control strategy to other variables that has meaningful effects on performance and championing.

These findings contribute to the growing literature examining the influence of managerial control systems on individual performance. Our results indicate that neither high control nor low control systems

are superior in terms of generating effective performance. Understanding how the control system fits with other important firm, individual, and environmental factors is more important when developing effective control systems.

In addition, this study contributes to existing knowledge of organizational champions. Past research readily acknowledges the importance of champions and more recently the importance of fostering championing. “Without champions, organizations may have a lot of ideas but few tangible innovations. The challenge facing management is to identify, and effectively manage, existing champions and to nurture potential champions” (Howell & Higgins, 1990, p. 55). Despite this call, empirical research studying the conditions under which champions will be most likely to emerge and flourish is limited. Our study begins to fill this gap. We indicate that the degree to which the control system fits with the optimal profile will have direct positive effects on the level of salesperson championing behavior.

Finally, our results extend the domain of configuration theory. Profile deviation analysis has been used frequently in an environment-strategy context; however, it has not been used as prevalently in other contexts. “As we move away from bivariate fit under *ceteris paribus* conditions towards conceptualizing and operationalizing fit in its multivariate holistic manifestation, the pattern-analytic approach will have its appeal beyond the specific theme of “environment-strategy” coalignment” (Venkatraman & Prescott, 1990, p. 19). This study effectively illustrates the use of profile deviation analysis in the evaluation of fit between firm level strategies, an individual-difference variable, and environmental variables.

7. Managerial implications

Our finding that control system fit (rather than simply control system type) affects performance holds important implications for managers who are responsible for directing, monitoring, and motivating salespeople. First, even though salespeople may be exposed to similar job demands and tasks they will not all respond to a particular control mechanism in the same manner. Based on our findings, for instance, we suggest that the extent of past sales experience of the salesperson is one of several factors that culminate to influence salesperson response to control. Thus, managers must be prepared to tailor control to individual characteristics. Furthermore, we suggest that market characteristics and additional strategic considerations also drive how control is received. More or less market turbulence, product complexity, a relationship selling strategy, and/or empowerment strategy are all likely to come together to influence how a given control strategy is received. As a result, following such things as a significant salesperson turnover or a shift in the market place the manager must not hesitate to modify a previously successful control system. A control system that has worked well with different salespeople in a different market may not be as effective when individual and environmental factors change.

Traditionally, managers select control systems with an eye toward improved achievement of specific output control performance objectives such as market share or sales volume for example. Prior research indicates that champions effectively establish organizational momentum, advance the overall organization along with new product/project initiatives (Hutt, Reingen, & Ronchetto, 1988), breathe life into radical new ideas, risk professional failure in favor of promoting organizational success (Schon, 1963) and represent emergent leaders/change agents (Taylor, Cocklin, Brown, & Wilson-Evered, 2011). This research posits that ideal control system fit fosters championing. Therefore, control fit design efforts must take a broader view of organizational objectives than one restricted to traditional sales performance outcomes.

8. Limitations and directions for future research

As with any study, this research suffers some limitations. First, because of our attempt to collect survey responses from both sales

managers as well as salespeople, our resulting response rate was somewhat low. However, given the associated benefits of matched dyad data, we were prepared to sacrifice response rate in an attempt to alleviate common method concern. Additionally, our study considers firms in a single industry. This was requisite in order to explore the optimal fit to performance relationship. Nonetheless, research of other industries and research across industries is needed to establish greater generalizability of the findings.

Next, although the use of configuration theory was helpful in gaining understanding of the combined effect of multiple potential moderator variables, in the process it somewhat dampens our ability to highlight the specific effect of a given variable. As with our sample size limitation, however, we again think that the benefits of configuration theory in advancing our understanding of the combined effect of poor control system fit outweigh the necessary muting of specific effects. Further, in applying configuration theory, we were able to demonstrate that two moderator variables, at least in this sample, had limited importance in association with control (i.e., salesperson age and firm size).

We acknowledge that this research is just a first step in understanding the effects of a control system on consequent variables. Although we propose that sales performance and employee championing are crucial variables, there are still numerous outcomes that could be explored. For example, the effects of a deviation from optimal control would logically have important consequences upon employee perceptions of organizational support, fairness, etc. A poor control system fit may result in sub-optimal distributions of rewards through the creation of a less than ideal process for such distribution. Further, our research study revealed two control profiles (high and low) and their correspondent match to organizational characteristics for eliciting best performance. Other insights could emerge when salespeople experience clan or bureaucratic control systems. Finally, we recognize that while this work suggests adopting a tailored approach that achieves the optimal fit matched to the organization's various characteristics, additional research is needed to provide managerial direction toward actual process design and implementation. Thus, work in control theory is far from complete.

Appendix A

Scale items of select constructs (item loadings provided in parentheses)

Control systems (Ramaswami, 1996)

Output 5 items, $\alpha = .90$, AVE = .56

Specific performance goals are established for my job. (.90)

My supervisor monitors the extent to which I attain my performance goals. (.91)

If my performance goals are not met, I would be required to say why. (.85)

I receive feedback from my immediate supervisor concerning the extent to which I achieve my goals. (.76)

My pay increases are based upon how my performance compares with my goals. (.58)

Process 4 items, $\alpha = .85$, AVE = .61

My immediate boss monitors the extent to which I follow established procedures. (.68)

My immediate boss evaluates the procedures I use to accomplish a given task. (.89)

My immediate boss modifies my procedures when desired results aren't met. (.84)

I receive feedback on how I accomplish my performance goals. (.60)

Self 4 items, $\alpha = .80$, AVE = .64

The major satisfaction in my life comes from my job. (.68)

The work I do on this job is very meaningful to me. (.61)

I feel that I should take credit or blame for the results of my work. (.74)

I like to do more than my share of the work at my job. (.79)

Professional 5 items, $\alpha = .94$, AVE = .54

The department encourages cooperation between its members. (.80)

Most of the members in my department are familiar with each other's work. (.79)

The department fosters an environment where we respect each other's work. (.90)

The department encourages job related discussions between members. (.88)

Most members in my department are able to provide accurate appraisals of each other's work. (.78)

Relationship selling strategy (Heide & Miner, 1992) $\alpha = .77$, 4 items, AVE = .68

Your company expects relationships with customers to last a lifetime. (.62)

It is assumed that renewal of agreements in relationships will generally occur. (.72)

Your company makes plans not only for the term of individual purchases but also for the continuance of relationships. (.84)

The relationship with our customers is essentially 'evergreen'. (.87)

Market turbulence (Slater & Olsen, 2000) $\alpha = .73$, 4 items, AVE = .53

Competition in our industry is cutthroat. (.75)

There are many 'promotion wars' in our industry. (.70)

Anything that one competitor can offer, the others can readily match. (.66)

Price competition is a hallmark of our industry. (.64)

One hears of new competitive moves very frequently. (.70)

Product complexity (Slater & Olsen, 2000) $\alpha = .67$, 2 items, AVE = .517

Most buyers would say that we and our competitors sell a technically complex product. (.78)

Our major product is relatively simple for most buyers to understand. (.85)

Individual performance (Sujan et al., 1994) 6 items, $\alpha = .90$, AVE = .70

Contributing to your company's acquiring a good market share. (.77)

Selling high profit-margin products. (.65)

Generating a high level of dollar sales. (.78)

Quickly generating a high level of dollar sales. (.81)

Identifying major accounts in your territory and selling to them. (.75)

Exceeding sales targets. (.79)

Championing (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992) 4 items, $\alpha = .91$, AVE = .64

Brings new opportunities to the attention of higher-level managers. (.88)

Proposes new programs and projects to managers. (.90)

Define and justify the role of new programs to upper-level managers. (.86)

Justify to higher-level managers programs that have already been established. (.79)

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