

SALES MANAGERS' MENTAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: A CROSS-FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study is one of the first studies on a functional level that identifies cross-functional differences in leaders' perceptions on effective leadership. More specifically, we "looked into the mind of leaders" and identified leaders' objectives for applying specific leadership styles in the specific environment of the marketing/sales function versus non-marketing/sales functions. Overall, this study provides empirical support for the distinctiveness of marketing/sales managers' mental representations of effective leadership. With regard to the research objectives formulated at the beginning of this study, the following implications can be summarized: The first research objective was to create initial knowledge on marketing/sales managers' mental representations of effective leadership. Generally, marketing/sales managers' mental representations consist of knowledge on effective leadership which is related to three different categories of experiences. First, marketing/sales managers develop knowledge on leadership behaviors they experienced to be important in successfully completed projects or situations. Second, marketing/sales managers develop knowledge on characteristics of subordinates that managers experienced to be important in terms of successful accomplishment of subordinates' tasks. Third, marketing/sales managers hold knowledge on specific objectives they want to achieve in a certain period of time. Empirical results identified causal relationships between these categories of knowledge which serve as a basis for a comprehensive understanding of marketing/sales managers' mental representations of effective leadership. Moreover, mental representations of leadership explored in this study provide a basis for development of leadership theory as these mental representations capture the richness of the leadership phenomenon and reveal important constructs such as the distinction between internal and external customer-oriented leadership behavior or the coordination orientation and entrepreneurial orientation of subordinates which have not been clearly conceptualized in prior studies on leadership in marketing.

The second research objective aimed at providing a primary understanding of how leaders' mental representations differ across various functions within the firm. Cross-functional differences between marketing/sales managers and non-marketing/sales managers' mental representation revealed the following important findings: As in other functions marketing managers experienced transformational, transactional, external customer-oriented, and internal customer-oriented leadership styles to be important for leadership effectiveness. What was found to be marketing-specific is the relative importance of these four leadership styles compared to non-marketing functions (in this study: sales, R&D, operations, finance, and HR). Moreover, the way how a specific leadership style is implemented by managers differs between marketing and non-marketing functions in terms of single leadership behaviors. Finally, differences were identified which are related to the relationships between leadership behaviors and underlying objectives. More specifically, empirical results show that leaders from different functions select the same leadership behavior for achieving different objectives. In addition, the results of this study show that leaders from different functions select different leadership behaviors for achieving the same objective. These findings have important implications for managerial practice. In this study, it was argued that due to the cross-functional orientation of marketing tasks, marketing managers need to understand not only specific challenges of leadership in marketing but also leadership in other functional units that cooperate with marketing, such as sales, R&D, finance, and operations. Based on the results of this study, marketing managers may now better know which specific leadership behavior is preferred by managers in other functional units to achieve certain objectives. For example, marketing managers need to explain and prioritize the tasks of subordinates (in addition to management by objectives which they would normally select as leadership behavior in order to increase work motivation) when supervising employees from the operations function. Hence, marketing managers can use this knowledge on differences concerning effective leadership identified in this study in order to effectively achieve intended outcomes when supervising managers and employees from other functions.

As a result cross-functional interaction and hence the quality of marketing/sales decisions and actions may be improved significantly. In addition, the findings of this study will reduce costs of personnel development of managers significantly as management programs can focus on functional-specific requirements of leaders. Moreover, cognitive knowledge on effective leadership identified in this study will increase productivity and performance of both, marketing/sales managers and marketing/sales employees. Hence, managers lacking leadership experience or managers with a non-marketing/sales background taking over a senior management position in marketing/sales should be aware that the distinctiveness of the marketing/sales environment requires them to select a specific combination of leadership behaviors in order to contribute to the individual's and the firm's success.