

MANAGING SALES TECHNOLOGY-RELATED CHANGE MECHANISMS: A COMMITMENT AND COPING PERSPECTIVE

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SUMMARY

Sales organizations are undergoing formidable changes and the implementation of sales technology (ST) represents a strategic priority in complex and costly initiatives that seek to forge information technologies with people and processes in pursuit of sustainable competitive advantage. These ST-related changes stimulate a myriad of psychological responses that are vital to their success. This paper builds on the psychological, organizational change, information technology (IT), management, and sales literatures. Specifically, it proposes and tests a theoretical model of the interrelationships among the psychological responses associated with ST-related change (i.e., multi-component conceptualization of commitment to ST-related change and coping with change), and how, in turn, those attitudes influence salesperson ST infusion and sales performance. Data from 323 sales representatives across 22 European-based pharmaceutical sales forces generally support the posited model.

Theory and Hypotheses

Consistent with the relevant literature (e.g., Herscovitch and Meyer 2002), this study takes a person-oriented change approach to investigate ST adoption and its consequences. Thus, our emphasis is on the psychological mechanisms that individuals invoke to cope with and commit to ST-related change. Following an extensive review of the literature and several related studies and additional interviews with salespeople and sales managers, we identified two important constructs from recent research: (a) *coping with change* and (b) *commitment to change*, which constitute the psychological mechanisms relevant to ST implementation. We conceptualize commitment to ST-related change as a three-component construct comprising three distinguishable facets: *affective*, *normative*, and *continuance* commitment to change (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002). Coping with change refers to “an employee’s evaluations of a need for changes in the organization, perceptions regarding their ability to cope with such changes, and their perceptions of themselves as initiators of change” (Judge et al. 1999). Based on several lines of inquiry across diverse literatures we develop hypotheses positing that psychological mechanisms influence a salesperson’s ST infusion (i.e., full system use), which, in turn, affect both his/her behavioral and outcome performance.

Research Methods

Data were collected from salespeople working in the Greek pharmaceutical industry; salesperson names and addresses were provided by a mailing-list broker specialized in the prescription-based pharmaceutical industry. We randomly selected 800 salespersons from the list. Salespeople received questionnaires via mail. A total of 323 usable questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 40 percent.

Analysis

Measurement scales were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis, which indicated that measures possess adequate psychometric properties. Structural equation modeling was then employed to assess the hypothesized model relationships. The fit statistics indicated that the conceptual model fits the data well (RMSEA = .083; NNFI = .86; CFI = .87; SRMR = .088.).

Discussion and Implications

The present study integrates previously unexamined constructs from the wider psychological, organizational change, IT, management and sales literatures into a comprehensive framework. That proposed model delineates how ST-related change mechanisms can be managed successfully. Overall, the posited psychological mechanisms explain a relatively large proportion of the variance in ST infusion ($R^2 = .36$), supporting the importance of understanding and managing them when implemented ST-related change. In particular, the results of the study indicate different types of salesperson commitment have differential effects on sales behaviors. Surprisingly, although normative and continuance commitment are the major drivers of effective ST implementation, affective commitment does not have a statistically significant effect on ST infusion. We also found that normative commitment has a positive influence, whereas continuance commitment exerts a negative influence on ST infusion. Moreover, the results suggest that coping with change behaviors are positively related with both ST infusion and salesperson performance. The findings of our study have important implications for both theory and practice. References are available on request

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