

Academic Paper

Sales coach competencies framework: An exploratory approach

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Abstract

In today's competitive landscape, businesses require robust and effective sales strategies to achieve sustainable growth. Sales coaches play a crucial role in enhancing salespeople's performance through targeted coaching programs. This research aims to establish a competencies framework for sales coaches. To gather insights, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with experienced sales coaching experts. Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis techniques and MAXQDA software. The findings reveal four key dimensions of competence for sales coaches, producing the 'LIST' framework: Leadership and management competencies; Individual characteristics; Specific coaching competencies; Technical competence. Each dimension includes relevant subsets tailored to the competencies required for effective sales coaching.

Keywords

coachee, human capital, leadership, sales development, LIST framework

Article history

Published online: 23 February 2026



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Published by Oxford Brookes University

Introduction

A human capital approach is a major motivator for a company's success and creativity (Berman, 2019). Through soft assets and the resourcefulness of the company, organisations can increase personal development and growth, eventually leading to the accomplishment of their goals through employee training (Agustriyana & Pringgabayu, 2017). In this regard, creative and innovative workers gain essential knowledge and skills through education (Crompton, 2024). However, the traditional training methods are often not perfect in that they do not deal with the complexities and challenges that companies have to face in order to achieve success (Blumberg, 2014). The conventional ways may not sufficiently help units and teams, especially in the case of sales, which are the most important to a company's

profitability (Onyemah, 2009). Thus, to make sure teams can efficiently handle and lead at optimal competency levels, companies may need to dedicate funds targeted at training and development programs (Cooper, 2019).

Training and development in organisations have changed very much when we consider the productiveness of work. As tasks have become more complex and dynamic, training has shifted from mere productivity assurance in simple tasks to skills necessary for coping with complicated challenges (Bell et al., 2017). In this contemporary landscape, traditional training methods often do not meet the employees' sophisticated needs of the workplace. As a consequence, there are more and more companies that are using coaching as a strategic means to boost employee performance and ultimately improve the whole system. Coaching provides a customised and flexible way for employees to develop their skills, giving employees the chance to get specific feedback and advice that is in accordance with the needs of their positions and responsibilities (Sonesh, Coultas, & Marlow, 2015). This shift towards coaching contributes not only to the enhancement of individuals' skills but also to the establishment of a continual learning and adaptability culture within organisations. Through coaching initiatives, companies will be able to more adequately equip their personnel to handle the changing business climate and, as a result, to foster innovation and gain success in the long run.

Coaching has been positioned as a critical method for improving the performance of organisations, especially in respect to sales. Burchardt (2015) points out that coaching is a process that is holistic and solution-oriented, which gives business leaders and managers the ability to face the complexities of dealing with and understanding their environment. This personalised method of skill development has been increasingly accepted in the last decade, with organisations more than ever before allocating considerable resources—both financial and human—to coaching initiatives (Azizi & Gudarzi, 2015). The influence of coaching is not limited to the improvement of individual abilities; it is also a vehicle for the creation of sustainable change and innovation within organisations (Murphy, 2022). By increasing their sales coaching skills, employees can not only enhance their effectiveness in dealing with team members but also teach them techniques such as constructive feedback and goal setting (Williams, 2022). Expert sales coaches have a vital function to direct salespeople to specific goals (Park, McLean, & Yang, 2020). An overwhelming number of managers, indeed, over 93% of them, firmly believe there is a necessity to conduct training for sales personnel and unit managers by skilled coaches, (Nguyen et al., 2019). This accentuates the fact that coaching is regarded as a crucial aspect of the sales strategy development process on sale strategy development.

Nonetheless, coachees need to develop the ability to inquire appropriately and resolve possible conflicts that could occur during the coaching process. In the facilitator/catalyst role, the coach, therefore, is both. Coaches highlight an atmosphere on the stage an atmosphere that is favorable for growth (Audet, 2012). To be clear, coaching is a distinguished tool that can help not only enhance the abilities of the sales teams but also improve the overall performance of the organisation (Kovac, 2016). By budgeting for coaching, corporations can get more creativity from their staff and are more equipped to deal with a changing business environment.

In order to improve salesperson skills, it is important that there are coaches with the needed expertise in this field. Up to now, there is still a large gap in the literature on this framework. Hence, this study asks the underlying question: Which competencies are required for sales coaches? To achieve this goal, we have reached out to experts in the field of sales coaching. In this research paper we have made several contributions: first, the data collection process involved sales coaches who had been in the role for quite a long time. Second, we introduce the LIST multi-level competency framework particularly for sales coaches. We describe four key competency areas and the components associated with them. The next sections introduce the findings as follows: we start with an exposition of the theoretical foundations and background of the research, then proceed to an elucidation of the research methodology. Finally, we present our results, finishing with a wrap-up of the major findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

Theoretical foundations and background

Coaching represents the art of fostering learning, enhancing performance, and driving improvement, while focusing on the realization of specific results. It empowers individuals to identify and overcome obstacles, clarify their aspirations, and set goals aligned with their values (McKevitt & Marshall, 2015). Coaching is increasingly recognised as a strategic approach to organisational development that enhances relationships between superiors and subordinates (Woo, 2017). Although coaching shares some similarities with other human capital development approach, it is actually distinct from them (Preechawong, 2024). As illustrated in Table 1, coaching is the optimal approach for enhancing both individual and organisational performance. This study focuses on delineating the core competencies of a sales coach.

Table 1: Human development approaches

Aspect	Education	Training	Coaching	Mentoring
Purpose	Broad learning objectives	Specific competencies	Goal achievement	Holistic development
Methodology	Lectures, textbooks, exams	Workshops and practice exercises	One-on-one or group sessions and feedback	Informal meetings, shadowing and networking support
Time	Long-term	Short-term	Short-term	Long-term
Structure	Structured curriculum	Specific and practical	Structured and formal	Informal and relational

Role(of guide)	Teacher	Trainer	Coach	Mentor
Outcome	Degree/theoretical knowledge	Certificate/practical knowledge	Performance advancement	Holistic growth
Impact	Academic achievement	Job readiness	Job performance	Career development

In the context of sales, where competition is fierce, organisations must cultivate a dynamic coaching process to ensure sustainable success. Recent trends indicate a growing emphasis on sales coaching over traditional training methods, positioning it as a critical development program for both sales personnel and managers. Effective coaching not only improves individual performance but also positively impacts organisational sales outcomes. Research suggests that managers and salespeople leverage coaching to identify skill strengths and weaknesses, enhance problem-solving capabilities, and boost overall productivity (Badrinarayanan & Dixon Vicki, 2015). Furthermore, operational sales managers regard coaching as the most effective strategy for achieving planned objectives (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Sales coaching is a nuanced process that encompasses ongoing conversations, interactions, and activities aimed at enhancing the performance of salespeople or sales teams through continuous feedback and encouragement (Coimbra & Proença, 2023). This multidimensional activity integrates various elements such as supervisory feedback, role modeling, and trust-building, which are essential for creating an effective coaching environment. Successful sales coaches must engage in responsive communication that acknowledges and addresses the behaviors of their sales team members, fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect (Nguyen et al., 2019). The impact of sales coaching extends beyond immediate performance improvements; it also influences critical psychological factors such as motivation, role ambiguity, optimism, and job satisfaction (Badrinarayanan & Dixon Vicki, 2015). By developing essential skills like listening and empathy, coaching can help salespeople manage anxiety associated with their roles (Pousa, Liu, & Aman, 2020).

Sales coaching shares similarities with coaching in other domains, such as sports and management. For instance, both fields emphasise motivation, learning, feedback, and reinforcement as core components of the coaching relationship (Rapp et al., 2020). In a managerial context, coaches—typically managers or supervisors—are responsible for guiding their subordinates, paralleling the role of sports coaches (Hawes & Rich, 1998). Moreover, sales coaching is adaptable to various organisational structures, including centralised and virtual sales teams. While there are overlaps between sales coaching and coaching in other fields, distinct differences exist. The primary goal of management coaching is to facilitate learning through managerial behaviors, whereas sales coaching focuses on equipping sales personnel with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to align with the organisation's goals and mission (Rapp et al., 2020; Nonis & Sager, 2011).

Coaching has emerged as a crucial developmental technique for enhancing various aspects of salesperson performance, including motivation, role ambiguity, job satisfaction, supervisor satisfaction, and overall job performance (De Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013). By employing coaching strategies, managers can significantly influence their sales teams' effectiveness. One key area where coaching proves beneficial is in fostering active empathic listening skills among salespeople. This skill enables them to better interpret both verbal and nonverbal cues from customers during sales interactions, allowing for more effective communication and relationship-building (Hawes & Rich, 1998). Additionally, a coaching approach can be particularly helpful for salespeople who experience anxiety. By providing support and guidance, managers can help these individuals manage their nervousness, leading to improved anticipation and control over sales-related stress (Nguyen et al., 2019). This not only enhances individual performance but also contributes to a more positive team environment. Sales coaching is fundamentally a practice-oriented process designed to equip sales personnel—ranging from entry-level salespeople to senior executives—with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities. This development focuses on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects that enable sales professionals to achieve predetermined goals effectively (Rapp et al., 2020). Moreover, the impact of coaching extends beyond traditional sales roles. For instance, entrepreneurs who possess characteristics such as risk-taking and strategic planning are shown to be 52.8% more likely to pivot their marketing strategies in new directions after having received coaching (Anderson, Chintagunta, & Vilcassim, 2023).

In their research, Elhajjar and Yacoub (2024) highlight critical dimensions that significantly influence B2B business performance: supervisory feedback, role models, and motivation. Effective time management also emerges as a key leadership behavior, emphasizing the need for managers to allocate more time to managing people, including planning and analysis, customer interactions, and overseeing teams with varying levels of experience (Rapp et al., 2020). Moreover, individuals with high internal control tend to excel in planning and executing sales strategies. This underscores the importance of aligning managerial traits with effective sales practices.

Coaches, too, must possess considerable expertise in sales and related fields to provide meaningful guidance (Nonis et al., 2011). Sales coaching is often framed as a multidimensional activity that incorporates supervisory feedback, modeling, and the trust that salespeople place in their managers (Hawes & Rich, 1998). Key competencies for effective coaches include experience in entrepreneurial environments, relevant skills and knowledge, the ability to provide quality content, understanding of human behavior, and availability. Additionally, coachee characteristics such as a commitment to continual learning, the ability to face challenges responsibly, and teamwork capability are crucial for successful coaching outcomes (Berman, 2019). Executives participating in coaching programs benefit from being purposeful, motivated, insightful, responsible, and possessing foundational knowledge (Cooper, 2019). The positive outcomes of coaching encompass enhanced receptiveness to criticism, resilience against disappointment, improved methods and processes, and the dissemination of new knowledge (Dowejko & Chan, 2019). The interplay between coach characteristics, coachee traits, organisational conditions, entrepreneurial coaching actions, and resultant outcomes forms a comprehensive

framework for effective coaching programs (Azizi, Hosseinloo, Maley, & Dabic, 2023). Despite the established significance of coaching in enhancing business performance, a gap remains in identifying specific dimensions and components of sales coaching competencies. This research aims to address that gap by delineating these categories, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how coaching can be optimised within the sales domain.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology, focusing on the in-depth exploration of sales coaching competencies within the pharmaceutical industry. The data was analysed using content analysis, which allows for the identification of patterns and themes within qualitative data.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of experienced expert coaches specializing in sales within the pharmaceutical sector in Tehran (Table No,2). These individuals were selected based on their extensive knowledge and practical experience in the field, ensuring that the insights gathered would be relevant and applicable to the research objectives. Meanwhile the participants, who had professional experience working with leading pharmaceutical firms and business accelerators, were recruited using snowball sampling methodology.

Sampling Technique

The sampling was conducted using the theoretical saturation technique. This approach involves continuing to sample participants until no new information or themes emerge from the interviews. The process ensures that a comprehensive understanding of the topic is achieved, as it captures a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached, meaning that subsequent interviews did not yield significantly different insights or data. Theoretical saturation in the research occurred at case 11, and we continued to case 13 for higher confidence. This method enhances the reliability and validity of the findings, as it reflects a thorough exploration of the subject matter (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All participants were assured of their voluntary participation, anonymity, and the confidentiality of their data.

Table 2: Demographics of the participants

Row	Education degree	Gender	Job title	Sales coaching experience (years)	Total
1	Upper diploma	Male	Sales manager	12	2
		Male	Sales expert	8	
2	Bachelor	Female	Senior experts in supply	6	4

		Male	Sales expert	7	
		Male	Senior sales expert	11	
		Female	Sales expert	13	
3	Master's degree	Male	Internal sales manager	8	3
		Male	CEO	15	
		Male	Domestic sales assistant	14	
4	Ph.D.	Female	Sales financial manager	8	4
		Male	CEO	13	
		Female	Supplier	5	
		Female	Sales assistant	10	
	Total				13

This research utilised a qualitative approach, specifically employing semi-structured in-depth interviews to gather comprehensive insights into sales coaching competencies in the pharmaceutical industry. The following sections outline the methods used to ensure the validity and reliability of the study, as well as the data analysis techniques employed.

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, which provided flexibility for participants to express their thoughts while ensuring that key topics were covered. This format allowed for deeper exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives regarding sales coaching.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed as the primary method for analyzing the qualitative data collected from interviews. This technique is effective for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data, transforming diverse information into coherent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was conducted using MAXQDA software, which facilitated the organisation and coding of textual data. The thematic analysis process involved several steps: 1. Familiarization with the data 2. Generating initial codes 3. Searching for themes 4. Reviewing themes 5. Defining and naming themes 6. Producing the final report As a result of this rigorous analysis, four main categories emerged, representing key aspects of sales coaching competencies in the pharmaceutical sector (tables 3-6). This structured methodology ensures that the findings are robust and provide valuable insights into effective sales coaching practices in the pharmaceutical industry.

Validity and Reliability

To enhance the validity and reliability of the study, several quality criteria were applied

throughout the research process: 1. **Validity:** To verify the findings, a member-checking process was implemented. Interviewees were invited to review the interpretations and conclusions drawn from their responses, ensuring that their perspectives were accurately represented. 2. **Reliability:** To ensure consistency in data coding, two independent coders were involved in the analysis. Their collaborative efforts helped to confirm the reliability of the coding process and the interpretation of themes.

Findings

In this section, the research findings derived from the interviews and their subsequent analysis are presented. The three principal stages of thematic network analysis are text analysis, text discovery, and the integration of findings, which are elucidated in detail below.

Text Delivery: In the initial stage, the recorded interviews were transcribed, and the text was complemented by notes taken during the interview sessions. Following a meticulous examination of the text, specific patterns ideas were identified for each of the transcribed interviews, formulated into basic themes, with a corresponding code assigned to each. This process was applied consistently across all interviews, and instances of similar themes in the texts of previous interviews were coded accordingly. In this research, 248 primary codes were generated, which were subsequently categorised into 110 basic themes.

Transforming the themes: After obtaining the basic themes, according to the basic themes the organising and inclusive themes were abstracted, and at this stage, we tried to achieve more abstract themes by reorganising the basic themes or the same basic themes. In this step, 24 organising themes were extracted.

Discovering and describing the network of themes: by examining and analyzing related themes, the LIST global themes were extracted: 1) Leadership and management competencies; 2) Individual characteristics; 3) Specific coaching competencies; 4) Technical competencies:

1. Leadership and management competencies

There are characteristics that facilitate the effective and efficient utilisation of human resources from a managerial perspective, and coaches focused on leadership development should embody these traits in order to adequately guide and supervise high-level coachees. This subject encompasses various elements, including planning and self-management (Table 3).

Table 3: Themes related to leadership and management competencies

Global Themes	Organising Themes		Participant Code	Basic themes and participant codes
	First level	Second level		

Leadership and management competencies	Management	Self-managing	M10, M2, M11, M4, M8, M9, M6, M13, M5	Paying attention to one's own weaknesses and strengths(M10, M6), increasing self-awareness(M2, M13), accepting mistakes (M11, M5), being aware of one's own performance(M4), having discipline(M8)
		Planning	M8, M12, M7, M13, M6, M10, M4, M2, M1	Setting goals(M8, M10), identifying obstacles ahead(M12, M4), identifying problem solutions(M7, M2), preparing to solve upcoming problems(M13, M1), being forward-looking(M6)
		Problem solving	M5, M10, M11, M6, M2, M1, M13, M2	Analyzing the problem(M5, M6, M13), solving the problems (M10, M2, M2), evaluating the problems of the sellers(M11, M1)
	Leadership	Trust builder	M2, M10, M8, M5, M3, M4, M7	Trusting the seller(M2, M4), gaining the trust of others(M10, M7), defending the rights of others(M8), obeying the laws(M5), knowing the wishes of the sellers(M3)
		Charismatic	M8, M6, M13, M3, M11, M10, M1, M5, M9, M2	Being attractive(M8, M10, M2), charming personality(M6, M1), being respected by everyone(M13, M5), having a good prestige(M11, M9)
		Influential	M13, M4, M8, M10, M7, M11, M3, M2	Being efficient and effective(M13), the ability to influence(M4), guiding sellers(M8), having a moderate personality (M10), encouraging

				sellers(M7), the ability to motivate and inspire(M11), individual attention(M3), creating inner motivation in other(M2)
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One interviewee (M4) noted that:

Sales managers, particularly those with multiple responsibilities, do not always demonstrate optimal performance. The coach should address this issue with tact and strive for optimal performance, thereby instigating change and continually assessing this transformation."

Another interviewee (M8) emphasised that:

A coach should be able to set goals for their coaching programmes and plan strategically to implement these objectives. This is particularly important in contexts where sales representatives engage in face-to-face interactions with customers, as the perspectives of sellers on the work process are critical.

Additionally, leadership is regarded as a significant management skill, with the ability to influence sales personnel and exhibit charisma being of paramount importance. In this context, one interviewee (M10) remarked: "Coaches should possess a certain charm in the eyes of the salespeople, ensuring that they are accepted." Such a response indicates that if the coach is perceived as calm and confident, their presence becomes a crucial asset in meetings, signifying that their presence or absence does have an impact. Moreover, one interviewer (M2) asserted that

The coach's role is to create an environment characterised by mutual trust and respect, allowing both parties to achieve their preferred goals; this constitutes one of the primary responsibilities of the coach.

2. Individual characteristics

This theme encompasses the organising characteristics of being motivated, decisive, creative, conscientious, extroverted, and audience-oriented. Creativity and possessing a creative spirit refer to characteristics such as encouraging new behaviours, novel ideas, innovative plans, and the application of creativity to assigned tasks. Such traits enable coaches to employ creative methods tailored to each meeting as required (Table 4).

Table 4: Themes related to individual characteristics

Global Themes	Organising Themes	Participant Code	Basic themes and participant codes
	Motivated	M11, M2, M12, M4,	Increasing the motivation of salespeople(M11), having managerial motivation(M2), being self-motivated(M4), having an entrepreneurial spirit(M3),

Individual characteristics		M3, M10, M8, M5	knowing one's own spirit(M10), being interested in sales(M8), internal motivation(M5).
	Decisive	M10, M13, M11, M6, M12, M4, M7, M5, M1	The ability to criticize (M10, M4), having a decisive personality(M13, M7), daring and enterprising(M11, M5), making contingent decisions (M12, M1), having self-confidence(M6)
	Creative	M10, M12, M8, M11, M2, M1, M3, M7	Supporting new behaviors(M10, M7), new ideas(M12), creative plans(M8), being innovative(M11), flexible(M2), having creativity(M1), curiosity in new issues and events(M3)
	Conscientious	M11, M13, M8, M1, M11, M10, M2, M9	Building trust(M11, M10), keeping seller's secrets(M13, M2), adhering to principles and regulations(M8, M9) Fulfilling duties(M1), committed(M11)
	Extrovert	M7, M6, M13, M2, M10, M1, M5	Having a positive vision(M7, M1), responsible(M6, M5), ability to face issues(M13), availability(M2), easy interaction(M10)
	Client oriented	M13, M1, M8, M12, M7, M9	Knowing the situation of sellers(M13), the right time for coaching(M1), identifying and diagnosing crises(M8), understanding sellers(M12), identifying the needs of sellers(M7), helping sellers to be active(M9)
	Integrity	M1, M12, M8, M11, M13, M4, M7, M9	Stable moral character(M1, M9), preferring the collective interest over the individual(M12), not being afraid to tell the truth(M8), interest in the progress of others(M11), not being jealous(M13), transparency(M4), honesty(M7)

In this context, one interviewee (M8) stated:

... for example, the conditions of question-and-answer sessions that occur between sellers; the approaches and methods applied in the market in a viral manner may not adequately address the needs of customers. In this field, the coach's work begins with creativity. He/she adopts better methods from the sellers, who are the coachees, and provides feedback with slight modifications.

Another interviewee (M12) remarked:

Possessing a spirit of ideation, being creative, having self-confidence in decision-making, and demonstrating determination across various issues and challenges can be regarded as characteristics of individuals in the coaching role." Additionally, one interviewee (M7) expressed the belief that: > "... if sellers (coachees) do not take your feedback seriously as a coach and fail to implement it in practice, there may be several reasons for this. The coach can address this issue by fostering a friendly atmosphere and generating the appropriate motivation. If the feedback is still unaccepted, it may indicate a misalignment with the sales field. My personal belief is that the presence of a coach and the coachability of a company are invaluable components of the organisation.

3. Specific coaching competencies

This global theme encompasses various aspects, including the facilitation of learning, delegation of authority, coaching competencies, personal and interpersonal communication, feedback mechanisms, and listening skills. Among these, the ability to coach and foster interpersonal relationships is particularly prominent. This capability pertains to mastering the complexities of the organisation, addressing ambiguities and questions posed by sales personnel, establishing effective communication with colleagues, and facilitating constructive interactions (table 5).

Table 5: Themes related to specific coaching competencies

Global themes	Organising themes		Participant code	Basic themes and participant codes
	First level	Second level		
	General	Facilitating learning and development	M3, M11, M10, M1, M5, M9, M2, M4, M7	Learning style(M3), facilitator(M11), learning ways(M10), use of technology(M1), reducing fear and anxiety of learning (M5), ability to use techniques and tools(M9), situational coaching(M2) research and development(M4), fast learning(M7), educational strategies(M10)
		Delegation of authority	M8, M9, M6, M13,	Delegating responsibilities(M8, M2,

Specific coaching competencies			M2, M4, M10, M7, M11, M3	M11), flexibility in plans (M9, M4), getting help from colleagues(M6, M10, M3), trusting sellers(M13, M7)
		Client oriented	M13, M6, M10, M4, M7, M1, M2, M8, M11, M3	Answering the questions of sellers(M13, M8), supporting the sellers(M6, M11), knowing the coachee(M10, M3), mastering client techniques(M4), ready to work any person(M7), approaching in short time(M1), perceptive skills, high empathy and sympathy(M2)
	Communication	Intra communication	M5, M10, M11, M6, M2, M1, M13, M8, M12, M7	Self-efficacy(M5, M13), individual verbal skills(M10, M8), effective methods of verbal transmission(M11, M12), emotional intelligence(M6, M7), using media(M2), writing transmission skills(M1)
		Interpersonal communication	M12, M13, M6, M10, M4, M7, M2, M1,	Creating a wide network(M12), good and effective communication with sellers(M13), colleagues and managers(M6), having appropriate interactions(M10), establishing effective interaction(M4), having good interaction

				between people(M7), networking skills(M2)
		Listening skills	M7, M13, M6, M10, M4, M9, M2, M1, M11, M8, M5	Active listening(M7, M5), paying attention to sellers' suggestions(M13), listening to sellers' words(M6), appreciating colleagues(M10), helping sellers to be active(M4), understanding other people's body language(M9), paying attention to customers(M11), knowing jargons(M8)
		Feedback skills	M9, M2, M3, M4, M7, M10, M12, M8, M5, M11	Ability to provide appropriate and honest feedback(M9, M4, M12, M11), ability to provide specific feedback to any sellers(M2, M7, M8), discrimination between constructive and destroying feedback(M3, M10, M5)

One interviewee (M6) noted:

To achieve positive results from the coaching session, it is imperative for coaches to establish a meaningful and appropriate relationship with the salesperson, who interacts with customers over the phone. This relationship should develop into a productive interaction, while simultaneously enhancing the salesperson's listening skills, thereby providing them with ample opportunity to articulate all relevant content."

Another interviewee contended that:

During coaching sessions, sales coaches should possess a thorough understanding of coaching techniques and methods, including training methodologies, psychological principles, an understanding of the salesperson's perspective, and effective task delegation.

In a further interview with M13, it was observed that:

Coaches can be most effective when they recognise that each salesperson possesses unique characteristics and should establish a two-way communication bridge. This approach will allow them to delve into the salesperson's perspective and identify their strengths and weaknesses.

4. Technical competencies

This theme comprises the organising elements of technological knowledge, sales competence, and market understanding. Among these, the theme of sales knowledge and the sales process holds priority over the others, referring to concepts such as familiarity with and knowledge of sales processes, the execution of sales activities, and the ability to analyse the market or sales environment (Table 6).

Table 6: Themes related to technical competencies

Global themes	Organising themes	Participant code	Basic themes and participant code
Technical competencies	Sales knowledge	M6, M10, M4, M7, M2, M1, M10, M3, M11, M12	Knowing the management of sales(M6), influencing and persuading of costumers(M10), how to do in selling(M4), the ability to analyse market(M7), familiarity and use of new sales methods(M2), sales budgeting(M1), body language(M10), international sales knowledge(M3), sales tools and technologies(M11)
	Sales experience	M6, M10, M12, M1, M2, M8, M7, M11, M4	Sales experience(M6, M2, M4), communication experience with all kinds of customers(M10, M8), visitor experience (M12, M7), industry experience(M1, M11)
	Product knowledge	M10, M6, M2, M1, M13, M8, M12, M7	Knowing the advantages and disadvantages of the product(M10, M13), knowing the competing and alternative products(M6, M8), knowing the product life cycle(M2, M12), knowing the product specifications(M1, M7)
	Company recognition	M1, M3, M8, M4, M11, M10, M5, M9	Company mission(M1, M10), company vision(M3, M5), organisational chart(M8, M9), industry ecosystem(M4), market knowledge(M11)
	Knowledge of sales technology	M4, M7, M6, M1, M2, M8,	Knowledge of modern technology(M4, M8), familiarity with all kinds of sales and commercial software(M7, M11), having software and programming knowledge(M6,

		M11, M12, M13, M5	M12), familiarity and mastery of related social applications(M1, M13), ability to use artificial intelligence tools(M2, M5)
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One interviewee (M2) stated:

No matter how proficient the coaches are in terms of coaching, if they lack sufficient knowledge about the subject they intend to coach, they will not succeed. Therefore, they must first comprehend the environment, thoroughly understand the job, and also enhance their own knowledge in the field of sales, as well as understand factors directly related to sales and their implications. Proficiency in this area can significantly enhance whose effectiveness in coaching the sales personnel, instilling confidence that the coach possesses adequate knowledge of the subject and has valuable insights to offer.

Another interviewee (M11) emphasised that: "...a coach within the sales system should be acutely aware of emerging market knowledge. The coach should be highly sensitive and remain aligned with market trends and industry developments." While a further interviewee (M4) remarked:

Coaches should learn modern marketing methods and stay abreast of contemporary scientific advancements, as any situation may necessitate the implementation of relevant methods, such as digital marketing.

From these discussions, it can be inferred that one of the fundamental characteristics of effective coaches is their familiarity with specialised knowledge in the field, alongside a demonstrable expertise.

Discussion and Conclusion

The absence of a coherent and integrated framework for the competencies of sales coaches has highlighted the need for a competency framework specifically designed for sales coaches in businesses. Following interviews with experienced experts, we identified the 'LIST' set of dimensions, components, and indicators that encompass "Leadership and management competencies, Individual characteristics, Specific coaching competencies, and Technical competencies, along with relevant subsets for sales coaches. The findings are summarised in Figure 1.

The competency of "**Leadership and management**" is crucial pillar for sales coaches, as it encompasses a range of skills that enhance both the coaching process and the overall performance of the sales team. Here's an in-depth look at how these competencies manifest and their impact on coaching effectiveness:

Leadership Competencies 1. Influence and Commitment: Effective leaders in coaching roles can inspire commitment among sales personnel. This influence is essential for aligning individual goals with organisational objectives, fostering a sense of purpose and direction. 2.

Facilitation of Learning: Coaches with strong leadership skills create an environment that encourages continuous learning. They facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration across departments, enhancing the overall skill set of the team. 3. Supportive Approach: Instead of providing direct answers, effective coaches ask probing questions that encourage self-discovery. This method promotes critical thinking and problem-solving among salespeople, empowering them to take ownership of their development. 4. Non-Judgmental Environment: By fostering a supportive atmosphere, coaches can reduce anxiety related to performance evaluations. This approach encourages open dialogue, allowing individuals to express challenges without fear of judgment.

Management Competencies 1. Planning: Effective planning allows coaches to set clear objectives for both individual and team performance. This structured approach ensures that coaching sessions are focused and aligned with organisational goals. 2. Problem-Solving: Coaches skilled in problem-solving can help salespeople navigate challenges more effectively. This competency enables them to identify barriers to success and develop actionable strategies to overcome them. 3. Time Management: Efficient time management ensures that coaching sessions are productive and that sales personnel can balance their responsibilities effectively. Coaches who model good time management practices can instill these habits in their coachees. 4. Self-Management: Coaches who practice self-management demonstrate discipline and accountability. This competency not only enhances their effectiveness but also sets a positive example for their teams.

Impact on Performance Research supports the idea that strong leadership and management competencies significantly influence individual and organisational performance (De Haan et al., 2013; Rapp et al., 2020). Coaches who excel in these areas can: - Uncover Hidden Talents: By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their team members, coaches can help develop untapped potential, leading to increased productivity. - Enhance Job Satisfaction: A supportive coaching environment contributes to higher job satisfaction among sales personnel, reducing turnover rates and fostering loyalty. - Drive Organisational Goals: Coaches with leadership capabilities ensure that their teams remain focused on achieving both short-term and long-term organisational objectives.

The integration of leadership and management competencies in sales coaching is not just beneficial—it is essential. Coaches who embody these qualities can create a dynamic coaching environment that promotes growth, collaboration, and high performance. The findings from various studies (Doweiko & Chan, 2019; McCarthy & Milner, 2020; Murphy, 2022) reinforce the importance of these competencies, highlighting how they contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of effective sales coaching practices. Ultimately, the combination of strong leadership and management skills equips coaches with the ability to navigate challenges while driving their teams toward success.

A second key pillar of sales coaching competencies is "**Individual characteristics**." Given that coaching is a learner-oriented approach, the coach's personality plays a crucial role in the coaching process. This research identifies self-confidence, motivation, decisiveness, and creativity as essential traits for sales coaches in businesses. Having the right personality traits not only attracts salespeople but also facilitates the sales coaching process. A coach who is creative, innovative, risk-taking, flexible, and patient embodies important personality

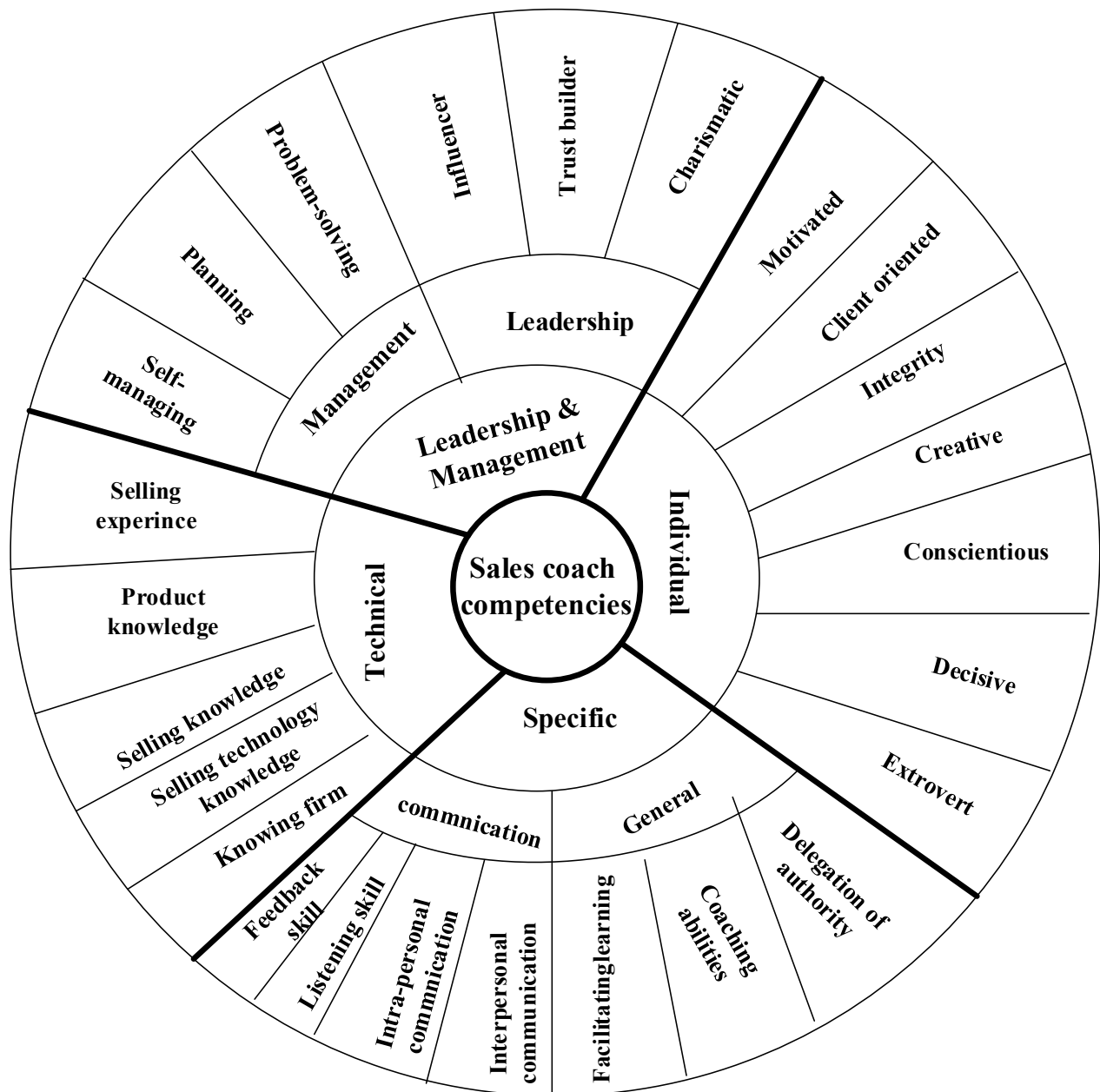
characteristics. These individual traits can serve as hidden motivations for coaches, influencing their effectiveness during coaching sessions, especially when faced with conflicting situations. For instance, a coach with high self-confidence can alleviate salespeople's stress, promote collaborative efforts, and enhance their motivation, ultimately leading to improved performance. While previous research has touched upon various attributes of coaches (Azizi et al., 2023; Berman, 2019; Schermuly et al, 2020; Stephan, 2018; Weinhardt & Sitzmann, 2019), this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the individual characteristics essential for sales coaches. Therefore, it is crucial to consider and measure these characteristics when selecting a sales coach.

The third competency related to coaching "**Specific competencies**" is vital for effective sales coaching. Coaches must be well-versed in various coaching techniques and skills to facilitate a principled and impactful coaching experience within any organisation. These skills can be categorised into two main areas: general coaching abilities and communication skills. **General Coaching Abilities** 1. Delegation of Authority: Effective coaches empower their team members by delegating tasks and responsibilities, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability. 2. Facilitating Learning: Coaches should create an environment conducive to learning, encouraging exploration and growth among sales personnel. 3. Coaching Ability: This encompasses the overall skill set required to guide and develop others effectively, including the ability to assess individual needs and tailor coaching strategies accordingly. **Communication Skills** 1. Personal and Interpersonal Communication: Strong personal communication fosters trust, while interpersonal skills enhance collaboration among team members. 2. Listening Skills: Active listening is crucial for understanding the needs and concerns of salespeople, allowing coaches to respond appropriately and supportively. 3. Speaking Skills: Clear and effective verbal communication helps convey ideas, expectations, and feedback in a way that is easily understood. Importance of Communication in Coaching Research indicates that strong communication skills are essential for coaches to lead effectively during meetings and throughout the coaching process (McCarthy & Milner, 2020; Rapp et al., 2020; Williams, 2022). Effective communication contributes to: - Building Relationships: Establishing good relationships with employees enhances trust and rapport. - Creating a Cooperative Atmosphere: A positive environment encourages collaboration and open dialogue, which is essential for team success. - Conflict Resolution: Coaches must possess the ability to navigate conflicts constructively, ensuring that team dynamics remain healthy. - Feedback Mechanism: Providing constructive feedback on strengths and weaknesses helps individuals improve and align with organisational goals. Coaches lacking these essential communication characteristics may struggle to achieve desired outcomes. Previous studies (Azizi et al., 2020; Bozer & Jones, 2018; Doweiko & Chan, 2019; McCarthy & Milner, 2020) emphasise that effective communication is a critical component influencing coaching sessions. Thus, coaches who master both general coaching abilities and communication skills are better equipped to foster a productive coaching environment that drives performance and growth within their teams.

The fourth competency identified in the model of sales coaches is "**Technical competency**." This competency encompasses several subcategories: sales knowledge, sales experience, mastery of sales technology, and knowledge of products and the company. Possessing this

technical and specialised competence is crucial for sales coaches, as it enables them to train and guide salespeople effectively in a practical manner. A coach with deep technical knowledge not only enhances their influence during coaching sessions but also solidifies their role as a leader. Coaches equipped with substantial experience and industry insight can offer relevant, real-world training, making learning topics more tangible for the coachee. To optimise the effectiveness of sales coaching, it is essential to select coaches from sales and trading departments who possess greater knowledge and expertise than their peers. This aligns with findings from other researchers who emphasise the importance of business knowledge and economic information, as well as an understanding of the business context (Berman, 2019; Cooper, 2019; Park et al., 2020; Rapp et al., 2020; Stephan, 2018). Therefore, it is imperative that sales coaches have a comprehensive understanding of their products, the company's offerings, and the broader industry landscape. This depth of knowledge not only enhances the coaching process but also fosters greater trust and credibility with sales personnel, ultimately leading to improved performance outcomes.

Figure 1: Competencies of sales coaches (LIST framework)



Recommendations

1. Integration into Educational Institutions: The competencies framework developed in this research could be incorporated into university curricula and training programs for aspiring sales coaches. This will ensure that future coaches are equipped with the essential skills and competencies necessary for effective coaching.

2. Implementation in Organisational Coaching Programs: Organisations could utilise the framework to identify suitable candidates for coaching roles at the onset of their coaching programs. Additionally, this framework can serve as a valuable tool for evaluating the effectiveness of these programs upon completion, ensuring continuous improvement.

3. Cross-Industry Application: The identified dimensions and components of sales coaches' competencies can be adapted for use in various industries. Future research should explore how these competencies manifest in different business contexts, enabling a broader understanding of effective coaching practices.

4. Quantitative Validation: Given that the model was developed through qualitative methods in a specific context, it is recommended that future researchers validate these findings using quantitative approaches. This will enhance the reliability and generalizability of the competence framework across diverse settings.

5. Incorporating Coachee Perspectives: Future research should consider gathering insights from coachees regarding the competencies they perceive as essential in their coaches. By incorporating the perspectives of those being coached, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of effective coaching competencies that align with coachee needs. These recommendations aim to enhance the applicability and robustness of the competence framework for sales coaches, fostering improved coaching practices across various sectors.

In this research, through studying real-life coaches using qualitative methods, we were able to identify a framework for sales coaches' competencies, including leadership competencies, individual characteristics, specific coaching competencies, and technical competencies. In fact, in the future, the widespread adoption of new technologies, including artificial intelligence as a key tool, may significantly contribute to the training and development of effective sales coaches.

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