

AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF SALES EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES AND SALES SKILLS, ATTITUDES, AND BEHAVIORS IN MBA PROGRAMS: THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

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ABSTRACT

In the United States (U.S.) recruiters have recognized that a promising source of sales recruits can be found on university campuses. Students graduating with degrees in marketing and numerous other subjects are sought by these recruiters due to their knowledge, ability to learn, and their potential for professional development. In fact, the requirements for new salespeople are increasing to the extent that firms are increasingly looking to MBAs as potential sources of new sales representatives. While the demand for salespeople continues to expand in the U.S., the demand for sales personnel is also increasing internationally. However, little is known about MBA student experiences, skills, attitudes and behaviors as they pertain to sales either nationally or internationally. The purpose of this research is to assess MBA student classroom exposure to sales and explore student attitudes and perceptions regarding specific skills, attitudes, and behaviors as they pertain to sales using an international perspective. Each of these purposes is addressed in a comparative fashion contrasting the experiences of MBA students in the United Kingdom with those in the U.S.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States (U.S.) sales has come to be recognized as an important component of marketing education programs (Michaels and Marshall 2002). However, sales careers are less frequently perceived as careers warranting a college degree in European nations (Honeycutt et al. 1999; Lysonski and Durvasula 1998). While sales educational experiences have been examined at the undergraduate level in the U.S., research addressing educational backgrounds as they pertain to sales at the MBA level in either the U.S. or the United Kingdom (U.K.) has not been discovered. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the degree to which topical matter related to sales is included in marketing courses in MBA programs in the U.S. and U.K. Additionally, the study will examine specific topics included in the instruction of sales, graduate student experiences in sales, and graduate students' skills, attitudes, and behaviors (SABs) in their practice of sales.

Employers have identified sales positions as being among the most difficult positions to fill with qualified applicants (Galea 2006). Correspondingly, the National Association of Colleges and Employers has identified sales as one of the top 10 jobs for college graduates (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2006). To acquire qualified applicants for sales positions, many

firms have looked to colleges and universities (Bristow, Gulati, and Amyx 2006; Nachnani 2007). However, employers recognize that they require a specialized type of college graduate to succeed in sales. These firms are seeking graduates with an understanding of sales and those who recognize the importance of sales (Sales and Marketing Management 2002).

Exploring these issues from an international perspective may be important for a variety of reasons. One of these reasons might be attributable to the fact that different countries perceive the relative importance and prestige of sales positions in different ways (Honeycutt, Ford, and Kurtzman 1996). For example, the sales profession is held in comparatively low esteem in Europe. According to Rogers (2009), approximately 66 percent of U.K. employers contend that they have challenges recruiting for senior sales positions. As a result of these challenges, these employers are increasingly seeking sales material in universities. However, it has been argued that recruiters in the U.K. have difficulties recruiting good sales personnel due to attitudes toward sales (Ellis 2000). Nevertheless, recruiting salespeople for international business is a major concern (Ford, Honeycutt, and Joseph 1995).

In an analysis of the importance of specific skills, attitudes, and behaviors, a multinational perspective may be important because in some nations (include European

nations) skills, attitudes, and behaviors that relate to closing are regarded as being offensive (Honeycutt, Ford, and Kurtzman 1996). Further, international students often regard selling as a profession that is low in status, requires manipulation, and does not contribute to societal goals (Lysonski and Durvasula 1998).

A determination of the degree to which sales and sales-related topics are included in MBA courses related to marketing, the experiences of graduate students as they pertain to sales, and these students SABs is relevant for a number of reasons. Foremost among these reasons is the fact that college campuses are a major source of new salespeople for a wide range of prospective employers (Michaels and Marshall 2002). Seeking college graduates for sales positions is not a new concept, as it has long been advanced as a major concern for U.S. businesses (Amin, Hayajneh, and Nwakanma 1995). College students are attractive recruits largely because they are perceived as being trainable and talented (Dubinsky 1980; Gurvis 2000; Lysonski and Druvasula 1998; Stevens and MacIntosh 2002–2003).

Questions have arisen regarding the skills desired by employers of graduates who had obtained their MBAs. It has been suggested “that the MBA is wholly out-of-touch with the ‘real world’ and the needs of practicing managers” (Rubin and Dierdorff 2009, p. 209). Research has generally indicated that employers interviewing MBA students feel that both oral and written communication skills should be included in MBA classes. In fact, research has indicated that a disparity exists between MBA student perceptions of the importance of communication skills and employers’ perceptions of the importance of these skills, with employers rating communications skills as being significantly more important than MBA students (Ulinski and O’Callaghan 2002). These findings are consistent with other research which indicates communication skills were rated as being highly important for MBA students and thus should be emphasized heavily in these classes (Kane 1993; Peterson 1997).

Research conducted by Rubin and Dierdorff (2009) identified employer ratings of six different behavioral competencies which were desired of MBA graduates. The managers included in the research stated that the two most important competencies were in the areas of managing *decision-making processes* and managing *human capital*. The area of managing human capital was described as including leadership dynamics and negotiation (a term that seems descriptive of a major sales-related activity). However, the research notes that while these are regarded by managers as the two most important skills for MBA graduates, they receive the lowest emphasis levels in MBA programs. Rubin and Dierdorff (2009) conclude by contending that MBA programs should focus more emphasis on the ‘people-focused’ portion of the curricula.

It is important that MBA students’ exposure to sales, sales experience, and SABs be analyzed because MBA

students are increasingly being recruited for sales positions. One reason for the focus on recruiting at higher levels is based on the fact that firms are no longer seeking product pushers, but are instead seeking solution developers (Nachnani 2007). As Pullins and Buehrer (2008, p. 15) state, “In today’s competitive business environment, selling requires high levels of professionalism, business acumen, and consultative service.” Such an attitude is reflected in other sentiments such as the one expressed by Ellis (2000) who contends that salespeople are increasingly required to have in-depth knowledge about their customers’ businesses; company services; buyer behavior; information gathering; marketing analysis; sales forecasting; new technologies; and more. It has been suggested that given the new environmental complexities that “salespeople need to raise their level of salesmanship to a consultant level” (Aronauer 2006). Rackham (2009) contends that employers and customers are both demanding salespeople who have “expertise, competence, and problems solving ability” to create value. Thus, selling is often referred to as being the equivalent of other professions and as such, individuals should recognize that those entering sales careers require educational qualifications similar to other professions (Cohen 2009). Others agree that the skill levels required for sales positions continue to increase and the requirements for new salespeople are showing corresponding increases as salespeople become more “solution oriented” rather than “sales oriented” (Chang 2007; DelVecchio and Honeycutt 2002; Ellis 2000). These requirements lead recruiters to focus on MBA students, who have been exposed to a wider and more in-depth array of these concepts (Simon 2006). However, Pullins and Buehrer (2008) also point out that sales education is largely absent from the graduate curricula at most Business Schools. Nevertheless, other firms are discovering that the knowledge gained from MBA programs is considerable enough that they reimburse salespeople for their expenditures as they pursue their MBAs (Butler 1996).

A challenge for many students and recruiters has been described as finding adequate resources for sales-related courses. As Michaels and Marshall (2002) note, business schools do not seem to offer adequate courses in personal selling. In fact, the disparity has been noted as: “There are roughly 120 university marketing courses for every course in sales. It’s roughly 60 sales jobs for every marketing job” (Cohen 2009, p. 10). Consequently, sales is often relegated to a secondary role in the classroom due to perceptions of being outside the traditional liberal arts mode, and due to challenges in finding qualified academicians to teach sales-related courses. Yet businesses are interested in discovering student knowledge and sales exposure/attitudes because college graduates are often a very important source of sales candidates (Stevens and MacIntosh 2002–2003).

RESEARCH ISSUES

It seems that the research indicates colleges and universities are increasingly becoming critical sources for new sales recruits. This situation may be largely attributable to the fact that graduates of these institutions have the aptitude and knowledge bases necessary to succeed in the world of sales. The literature also seems to support the sentiment that sales positions are becoming increasingly complex and customer-oriented. As the complexity and consultative nature of the sales position increases, sales recruits and salespeople require broader and more complete knowledge bases in many areas. This enhanced complexity and professionalism has created a situation in which graduate, or MBA students, are increasingly sought as potential sales recruits. Additionally, companies are increasingly engaged in international sales activities. This internationalization of sales creates its own complexities. Based on these factors, the primary purpose of this study is to examine four major research issues. First, the research is designed to determine the extent to which sales, as a topic, is included as a portion of marketing courses taught in the U.S. and the U.K. An evaluation of this issue will help identify the extent to which sales is a topic included in the curricula of students, which may help identify opportunities/challenges facing academicians and practitioners alike as they attempt to examine the degree to which MBA students are exposed to sales concepts and evaluate courses for the 21st century.

The second research issue assessed is an evaluation of the specific subtopics included under the auspices of the sales topic in MBA marketing courses. An evaluation of the subtopics should provide more of a micro-perspective into the emphases MBA professors are placing on sales-related subjects and the corresponding academic exposure of the students. This information can provide insight to MBA faculty and sales recruiters regarding the degree to which students have been exposed to sales-related subtopics.

The third research issue is one which should provide insights into the sales experience students possess upon entering an MBA program. An examination of research issue three should provide information pertaining to the "real-world" sales experience MBA students possess while in their MBA programs. The final issue relates to the third to the degree that issue four assesses students' skills, attitudes, and behaviors (SABs) regarding sales and provides cross-cultural comparisons of these issues. Thus, issues three and four provide both sales recruiters and marketing professors with information regarding the experience base of MBA students as well as knowledge regarding their perceptions of critical SABs as they pertain to sales. Evaluation of these two issues should provide insight into the base experiential levels of MBA students and thus lead to a determination of training and development requirements necessary for these indivi-

duals as they are considered for sales positions. Thus, the four research issues are designed to provide a direction for the research process and to provide information that may be used to examine levels of exposure to sales and sales-related subtopics as well as the extent of sales-related experience and actions (SABs) of MBA students.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Accomplishment of the research process required a sample of MBA students enrolled in the U.S. and in the U.K. Based on this requirement, two universities were selected as participants in the study, one in the U.S. and the other in the U.K. Both universities were accredited at all levels by the AACSB and both universities have enrollments of approximately 20,000 students.

Survey instruments were delivered to professors teaching marketing classes in the MBA programs of these universities. Both professors (one U.S. and one U.K.) agreed to assist in the data-gathering process and surveyed students in their classes. The surveys were administered to 335 students (178 U.S. students and 157 U.K. students). Students were not told the purpose of the study, were not required to complete the survey, but they were given class time to complete the survey.

The questionnaires consisted of questions to determine first whether personal selling concepts were included as a part of the MBA students' marketing classes. Responses to the first question then provided direction into subsequent sections of the study. If students indicated personal selling concepts were included in their marketing classes, they were then asked to specify the topics included in these classes. These topics included subjects such as product knowledge, company/industry knowledge, sales skills, customer knowledge/CRM, and customer satisfaction.

If sales skills were included as a segment of the marketing classes, the focus then shifted to the specific skills included in the class. The specific skills selected for analysis were identified by reviewing the skills included in two popular personal selling textbooks (Manning and Reece 2007; Weitz, Castleberry, and Tanner 2004). Using these two textbooks as a guide, twelve skills were identified for analysis. Students were then asked to indicate whether a particular skill had been included in their marketing classes.

The next segment of the research was designed to assess students' sales experience in the workplace. Those having experience were then asked to provide an evaluation of their perceptions of the degree to which they possessed/engaged in specific skills, attitudes and behaviors (SABs). A list of specific SABs possessed and/or engaged in by a salesperson was developed using previous research which had examined salesperson perceptions of their attitudes toward specific SABs (Chonko, Caballero, and Lumpkin 1990; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, and

Taylor 2007). Based on previous research, twenty-five SABs were identified. Students were requested to indicate their perceptions of the degree to which they engage in a SAB or their perceptions of the importance of a SAB using a seven-point Likert-type scale (7 = most important and 1 = not important at all). Thus, MBA students with sales experience were asked to identify their perceptions of the relative importance of possessing/engaging in each of the identified SABs.

FINDINGS

Usable responses were obtained from 141 U.K. students and from 169 U.S. students, resulting in response rates of 90 percent and 95 percent respectively. Table 1 provides the results of analyses comparing the inclusion of personal selling as a marketing topic in MBA courses in the U.K. with that occurring in the U.S. As shown, MBA students in the U.K. are significantly more likely to be exposed to personal selling concepts in their classes. This seems somewhat surprising, given the previously discussed lack of emphasis on sales in the U.K.

The findings also show MBA students' ratings of whether specific sales topics were included in their classes (assuming the subject of sales was included in their graduate marketing classes). As indicated, the topic most likely to be included in a discussion of sales was customer satisfaction (U.K. 90%; U.S. 82%). For the U.K. students, the topic which was the second most popular was one concerned with customer knowledge (U.K. 82%; U.S. 80%) and for U.S. students the second most popular topic was concerned with product knowledge (U.K. 79%; U.S. 81%). Students in both countries perceived the topics related to sales skills to be the fourth ranked topic (U.K. 75%; U.S. 79%); and company knowledge as the fifth-ranked topic (U.K. 62%; U.S. 65%).

The next step of the analysis focused on a comparison of the specific skills included in the sales segment (assuming sales skills were included in the sales coverage section). Table 1 indicates specific skills were in some cases given different degrees of emphasis in the two countries. For example, the skill most likely to be discussed in the U.S. was questioning (66%), but for the U.K. students, this skill was the fifth most important (36%). Conversely, the follow-up was the skill rated as tied for most important by the U.K. students (66%), yet it was rated as the fifth most included skill (42%) for the U.S. students. One additional difference focused on the inclusion of adaptive selling as a sales skill. The results show that adaptive selling is the fourth rated skill for the U.S. students (45%), but it was rated as the least included skill by the U.K. students (16%). The other skills seemed to be included in a similar manner in the sales courses in both of the countries.

The second table provides the results obtained from the questions concerned with the sales experience of the

two groups of students. As shown, U.K. students are more likely to state that they have experience in sales. The table also shows the type of experience held by the students. The findings reveal retail and service sales seem to be the predominant areas of sales for both groups. Relatively few students possess business-to-business sales experience.

Students with sales experience were asked to rate themselves on specific sales skills/attitudes/ behaviors (SABs). The results to their self-ratings are shown in Table 3. As indicated in the table, comparisons of the two groups of students yielded no significant differences in their self-ratings of specific SABs. Students seemed to be consistent in their identification of specific SABs as being more (or, perhaps less) important. These SABs included being courteous, not being snobbish/condescending, being available, listening, asking questions, regarding what the customer has to say as being important, and knowing their products. Not surprisingly, given their retail backgrounds, they did not regard SABs concerned with prospecting to be important. However, they also did not feel that they made clear complete presentations, nor did they contend that they rarely wasted time (which means they often wasted time).

IMPLICATIONS

The results indicate personal selling is a subject included in marketing classes taught in MBA classes in the U.K. for approximately 87 percent of the students. However, a different situation arises with regard to course coverage for MBA students in the U.S., as personal selling is a subject included in the marketing classes of only 57 percent of the students. This finding, which is contrary to expectations, indicates that personal selling is a topic that may be more appreciated in the U.K. The implication is that sales is recognized as being an important business skill in the U.K. As such, students in the U.K. might be better prepared to engage in sales activities after completing their graduate degrees. Further, this finding suggests U.K. professors might be more cognizant of the necessity of providing knowledge of professional selling to those receiving advanced degrees. While sales were significantly more likely to be included as a topic for U.K. students, no differences were found with regard to general topic coverage in the courses themselves between U.S. and U.K. classes. In fact, the general rankings were approximately the same, implying that the focus on specific sales topics is generally consistent.

With regard to specific topics included in classroom discussions of sales skills, a rather different picture emerges. As noted in the results, U.S. students were significantly more likely to have questioning skills included in their discussions of sales. This finding suggests U.S. students might be more focused on learning customer needs through questioning. The implication is that U.S. students may be taught that questioning might be necessary

TABLE 1
MBA STUDENT CLASSROOM EXPOSURE TO PERSONAL SELLING

Topic:	Included – N (%)	Not Included – N (%)
Personal selling was included in marketing class(es):		
United Kingdom Students	123 (87.2%)	18 (12.8%)
United States Students	97 (57.4%)	72 (42.6%)
Chi-Square (p): 33.2 (.0001)		
If personal selling was included:		
Product knowledge was included as a portion of this topic		
United Kingdom Students	96 (78.7%)	26 (21.3%)
United States Students	78 (81.3%)	18 (18.7%)
Chi-Square (p): .2 (.64)		
Company knowledge was included as a portion of this topic		
United Kingdom Students	75 (61.5%)	47 (38.5%)
United States Students	62 (64.6%)	34 (35.4%)
Chi-Square (p): .2 (.64)		
Customer knowledge was included as a portion of this topic		
United Kingdom Students	100 (82.0%)	22 (18.0%)
United States Students	77 (80.2%)	19 (19.8%)
Chi-Square (p): .1 (.74)		
Customer Satisfaction was included as a portion of this topic		
United Kingdom Students	110 (90.2%)	12 (9.7%)
United States Students	78 (82.2%)	17 (17.7%)
Chi-Square (p): 2.9 (.09)		
Sales skills were included as a portion of this topic		
United Kingdom Students	92 (75.4%)	30 (24.6%)
United States Students	76 (79.2%)	20 (20.8%)
Chi-Square (p): .4 (.51)		
If sales skills were included:		
Approach was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	34 (53.1%)	30 (46.9%)
United States Students	39 (52.7%)	35 (47.3%)
Chi-Square (p): .003 (.96)		
Questioning skills were a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	23 (35.9%)	41 (64.1%)
United States Students	49 (66.2%)	25 (33.8%)
Chi-Square (p): 12.6 (.0004)		
Prospecting was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	21 (32.8%)	43 (67.2%)
United States Students	30 (40.5%)	44 (59.5%)
Chi-Square (p): .88 (.35)		

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)
MBA STUDENT CLASSROOM EXPOSURE TO PERSONAL SELLING

Topic:	Included – N (%)	Not Included – N (%)
Qualifying was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	25 (39.1%)	39 (60.9%)
United States Students	30 (40.5%)	44 (59.5%)
Chi-Square (p): .03 (.86)		
Need Identification was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	29 (45.3%)	35 (54.7%)
United States Students	39 (52.7%)	35 (47.3%)
Chi-Square (p): .75 (.39)		
Presentation was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	42 (65.6%)	22 (34.4%)
United States Students	46 (62.2%)	28 (37.8%)
Chi-Square (p): .18 (.67)		
Demonstration was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	15 (23.4%)	49 (75.6%)
United States Students	21 (28.4%)	53 (71.6%)
Chi-Square (p): .43 (.51)		
Dealing with sales resistance was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	21 (32.8%)	43 (67.2%)
United States Students	33 (44.6%)	41 (55.4%)
Chi-Square (p): 2.0 (.16)		
Adaptive Selling was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	10 (15.6%)	54 (84.4%)
United States Students	33 (44.6%)	41 (55.4%)
Chi-Square (p): 13.4 (.0002)		
The close was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	24 (37.5%)	40 (62.5%)
United States Students	28 (37.8%)	46 (62.2%)
Chi-Square (p): .002 (.97)		
Negotiating was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	24 (37.5%)	40 (62.5%)
United States Students	33 (44.6%)	41 (55.4%)
Chi-Square (p): .71 (.40)		
Follow-up was a portion of the sales skill segment		
United Kingdom Students	42 (65.6%)	22 (34.4%)
United States Students	31 (41.9%)	43 (58.1%)
Chi-Square (p): 7.76 (.005)		

to help customers better state their requirements. Support for this position is also shown in terms of the segment of the sales skills portion indicating that U.S. students were

exposed more frequently (albeit insignificantly) to need identification than were U.K. students. This could suggest that in the U.K., the culture is not attuned to identifying

TABLE 2
MBA STUDENT SALES EXPERIENCE

Experience in Sales	Have Experience – N (%)	Do NOT Have Experience – N (%)
Have Experience in sales:		
United Kingdom Students	70 (52.6%)	63 (47.4%)
United States Students	71 (43.0%)	94 (57.0%)
Chi-Square (p): 2.72 (.10)		
IF experienced in sales, type of sales experience:		
Retail Experience:		
United Kingdom Students	53 (75.7)	17 (24.3%)
United States Students	47 (66.2)	24 (33.8%)
Chi-Square (p): 1.55 (.21)		
Retail Service Experience:		
United Kingdom Students	12 (17.1)	58 (82.9%)
United States Students	19 (26.8)	53 (73.2%)
Chi-Square (p): 1.90 (.17)		
Wholesale Experience:		
United Kingdom Students	6 (8.6)	64 (91.4%)
United States Students	4 (5.6)	67 (94.4%)
Chi-Square (p): .46 (.49)		
Manufacturer Experience:		
United Kingdom Students	2 (2.9)	68 (97.1%)
United States Students	7 (9.9)	64 (90.1%)
Chi-Square (p): 2.89 (.09)		
Service Experience:		
United Kingdom Students	24 (34.3)	46 (65.7%)
United States Students	23 (32.4)	48 (67.6%)
Chi-Square (p): .06 (.81)		
Years of Experience	U.S. Students:	U.K. Students:
Less than 1 year	19 (26.8)	17 (24.6)
1–2 years	19 (26.8)	9 (13.0)
2–3 years	21 (29.6)	41 (59.4)
3–4 years	8 (11.3)	1 (1.5)
More than 4 years	4 (5.6)	1 (1.5)

needs, but that customers are expected to have knowledge of their needs and the salesperson's role is one of service.

Adaptive selling is significantly less likely to be a portion of the sales skill segment in the U.K. than it is in the U.S. This finding suggests that perhaps in the U.K. salespeople are not as attuned to the interpersonal discussions and the enhancement of the customer's comfort as exists in the U.S.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

For years, companies have recognized that an excellent source of potential salespeople could be found on university campuses. These employers have been seeking educated individuals who have the capacity to solve business-related problems and establish suitable relation-

TABLE 3
MBA STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SKILLS, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Skill, Attitude, Behavior:	U.S. Mean (sd)	U.K. Mean (sd)	t (p)
I always approach customers using the proper approach techniques	4.8 (1.5)	5.2 (4.6)	.6 (.52)
Prospecting is a regular portion of activities	4.1 (1.6)	3.9 (1.6)	.7 (.47)
Most of my prospects are gained thru referrals	4.1 (1.7)	3.5 (1.6)	1.9 (.06)
I am capable of resolving most customer's needs	5.1 (1.6)	5.3 (1.2)	.5 (.60)
I try to figure out what a customer's needs are	5.4 (1.5)	5.4 (1.5)	.1 (.94)
*Price should be used as a primary method of sales	3.7 (1.6)	4.0 (1.6)	.9 (.38)
I rarely waste time	4.3 (1.4)	4.4 (1.5)	.5 (.63)
I am always courteous toward my customers	5.6 (1.6)	5.9 (1.5)	1.1 (.30)
*What I say is more important than what the customer has to say	3.0 (1.7)	3.1 (1.9)	.3 (.74)
I know about the products that I sell	5.7 (1.6)	5.4 (1.5)	1.0 (.31)
I am available when customers need assistance	5.7 (1.5)	5.5 (1.7)	1.0 (.30)
I listen to what the customer has to say	5.7 (1.6)	5.7 (1.5)	.1 (.91)
*I don't really enjoy assisting customers	3.1 (1.9)	3.1 (1.8)	.0 (.97)
*I only react and respond to customer requests	3.5 (1.4)	3.8 (1.5)	1.4 (.17)
I know the answers to customers' questions	5.2 (1.4)	4.9 (1.3)	1.0 (.32)
I ask questions to get them to talk	5.3 (1.4)	5.7 (1.4)	.5 (.60)
I try to learn as much as possible about needs	5.4 (1.4)	5.4 (1.4)	.1 (.90)
I use leading statements to get customers to talk	5.0 (1.6)	5.3 (1.5)	1.2 (.24)
I help my customers understand and visualize	5.2 (1.5)	5.1 (1.5)	.6 (.56)
I make clear and complete presentations	4.8 (1.5)	4.5 (1.8)	1.2 (.25)
I demonstrate products/services to the customer	5.0 (1.6)	5.0 (1.5)	.2 (.86)
I learn about needs prior to suggesting products	5.3 (1.6)	5.0 (1.5)	.9 (.39)
I often suggest complementary products	4.9 (1.7)	5.2 (1.5)	1.0 (.32)
I work to make customers feel appreciated	5.5 (1.5)	5.0 (1.6)	1.6 (.12)
*I am often snobbish and condescending	2.7 (1.7)	2.6 (1.7)	.4 (.67)

* reverse scored

ships with customers that will enhance corporate profitability. In recent years, it seems more firms have recognized the advantages of on-campus recruiting for their sales forces. This recognition seems to be correlated with an increase in both the knowledge levels and professionalism levels required of salespeople. In fact, as requirements for professional salespeople increase, it appears that firms are looking for individuals with an even greater understanding of business and business relationships. This search has led firms to consider students with graduate degrees, more specifically MBAs, as potential salespeople. To some degree, this effort has been thwarted due to what has been described as a paucity of formal sales education in universities in the U.S. (Cohen 2009).

However, little is known about the skills, attitudes and behaviors of MBA students as they relate to sales positions. Further, no research was uncovered which discussed any aspects of MBA student sales education and/or sales experience. Corresponding with the increas-

es in requirements for professional/skilled individuals to fill sales positions is the fact that sales is increasingly an internationally based occupation. With this international focus, it seems important to obtain an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of students in other countries with regard to sales. Thus, this research was designed to address issues as they relate to an international comparative analysis of MBA student academic exposure to sales, sales experience and perceptions of specific SABs that have resulted from these experiences.

The findings of this analysis indicate personal selling is a topic more likely to be included in the marketing courses for MBA students in the U.K. than for students in the U.S. This finding was surprising and an explanation of the finding would involve considerable conjecture. For example, one might argue that the focus on sales in the U.K. is the result of the fact that Marketing professors in the U.K. have a greater appreciation of the importance of sales than do their U.S. counterparts. Alternatively, this

finding could be a reflection of the fact that MBA students in the U.S. are exposed to greater information regarding sales in their undergraduate curricula and thus require less sales exposure than do their U.K. counterparts. Regardless of one's position pertaining to this finding, it does suggest that future research should be designed to evaluate the accuracy of this finding and to determine why differences exist in the degree of exposure to sales in MBA classes in the two countries.

With regard to the specific topical exposure to sales, it seems that students in both countries have similar experiences, thus indicating some level of consistency. However, some differences do exist in the inclusion of sales skill subtopics. The findings indicate questioning is the most important subtopic included in the U.S., but it was rated as far less important in the U.K. Similarly, adaptive selling was a skill which was included significantly more in the U.S. than in the U.K. Are these ratings reflective of cultural differences? One might surmise that the U.K. culture is one which would expect that customers disclose their needs/desires to their salespeople without

overt salesperson questions. Thus, questioning may be relatively less important in the U.K. for a successful engagement than it is in the U.S. Correspondingly, in the U.K. authenticity may be the norm and thus adaptive selling would be counter to this norm. Again, these issues could be the focus of future research to determine whether differences in classroom focus reflect cultural differences and whether these differences are attributable to some underlying business factor.

While many avenues for future research exist, this study does provide a starting point for research regarding MBA students, their classroom exposure to sales, their perceptions of specific SABs, and their sales experiences. Future research endeavors should be designed to further explore issues as they relate to MBA students, their attitudes, and their experiences. Such research should also assess other cultures as they pertain to these research topics. Additionally, issues such as adaptive selling, questioning and others could be explored more deeply in subsequent studies.

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