

Skills Required by Consultants for Success within the Competitive Auto Sales Business Environments

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Abstract

Automobile sector is significant to the United States economy accounting for over 3 million jobs in total employment (Mondal, 2011). Sales personnel are essential for generating revenues to sustain the Auto sector. However, automobile sale consultants' voluntary turnover rate approximates 34.7% costing dealerships about \$75,000 per salesperson in annual total cost (Davieson, 2011). Guided by knowledge-based view, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore skills required by some consultants in New York for success beyond five years within the competitive auto sales business environment. Data were collected through semi structured interviews from 20 participants who consulted in same auto dealership and succeeded at least 5 years. Data analysis involved coding techniques and cluster analysis. Member checking strengthened credibility and trustworthiness in interpreting participants' responses. The 3 themes that emerged related to skills used by auto sales consultants for success including Technical knowledge, Interpersonal, and Salesmanship Skills. Findings may contribute to social change by specifying some skills which successful auto sales consultants use to improve performance, mitigate job loss and reduce turnover rate. Information may enhance product training to facilitate sales skills and increase revenue leading to prosperity of auto dealerships, their employees, and the locality.

Keywords

competitive advantage, Front Desks, Resource-based view, dealers

1. Introduction

Competitiveness depends upon the mobilization of resources for products or services that are superior to those offered by competitors (Ghosh, Kumuthadevi, & Jublee, 2016). Business practitioners achieve competitive advantage when they perform a careful value creating plan or method not simultaneously performed by competitors (Akaeze, 2016; García-Castro & Ariño, 2011; Grant & Royle, 2011). In order to succeed in competitive markets, managers should be aware of different forces that affect their degree of competitiveness and should try to gain competitive advantages over their rivals in order to distinguish themselves in the market and enhance their sales and profitability (Aghdaie, Seidi, & Riasi, 2012; Riasi & Pourmiri, 2015). The purpose of customer service is satisfying needs of buyers and creation of competitive advantages. Quality salespeople reflect the required skills to satisfy customer needs (Lee & Hsieh, 2010).

1.1 Foundation of the Study

Automobile retail trading takes place in a dealership usually owned by a dealer (Carter, 2015). Two main customer services offered in a typical dealership are auto sale and after sales services. A typical dealer provides resources, place and products of the marketing mix critical to understanding the product or service they can offer and how to plan for a successful product offering. Dealers may have background in automobile sales but are responsible for hiring a general manger with solid background in managing automobile dealership.

The functions of a general manger involves managing and leading through planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating and controlling the dealership. In most cases, the general manager hires subordinate managers known as front desk. Front desk managers are tasked with recruiting and supervising consultants who are responsible to dispense auto sales services and monitor after sale relationships for customer retention. This study focus is on sales consultants in the automobile industry that succeeded in businesses at same dealership in New York City (NYC) for up to 5 years.

1.2 Background of the Problem

United States of America auto sector is significant to the economy accounting for over 3 million jobs in total employment (Mondal, 2011). Automobile production and sales contribute up to 0.5 percentage to GDP growth, approximately 16 percent of total growth (Chu & Su, 2010). However, Taskin (2016) suggested that competition in automobile sector and affiliate sectors is intense. Also, Yakasai and Jan (2015) suggested that sales personnel are critical assets of any organization. Furthermore, sales people are responsible for generating revenues to sustain organizations. Auto sales consultants are professional sales people who are well trained and equipped to self-make profits by any consummate dealership. Typical auto sales consultants are well grounded in the scripts, processes, and trading of automobiles. For this study, sales consultants were individual small business professionals who utilize resources provided by automobile dealership to engage, sell and retain customers for profit.

In performing the profit maximization job, auto sales consultants are perceived by general public as untrustworthy resulting to low productivity and profits. However, many auto sales consultants lack required skills to succeed in business resulting to a high turnover rate that cost dealerships to lose money. According to Davieson (2011), voluntary turnover of salespeople cost automobile dealerships about \$75,000 per salesperson annually. Furthermore, customers perceive price as fair, consistent and legitimate with favorable reputation (Helm, 2013; King & Whetten, 2008). Higher reputation results to increased purchase intentions which positively influence sales. Auto sales consultants confront challenges of bad reputations spanning from negative perception of the tactics, procedures and processes by consumers. Overcoming bad reputation to make deals involves skills which some automobile sale consultants do not possess. The purpose of this study was exploration of skills required by some consultants in New York for success within the competitive auto sales business environment.

1.3 Problem Statement

United States automotive sector contributes up to \$135 billion per year of federal tax revenues (Klink, Mathur, Kidambi, & Sen, 2013). Annual average employment for motor vehicle and parts dealers in 2015 is approximately 2.1 million (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2015). The problem is automobile sale consultants' voluntary turnover rate at approximately 34.7% costing automobile dealerships about \$75,000 per salesperson annually (Davieson, 2011). Some consumers perceive auto sales consultants as untrustworthy which affects productivity, sales and revenues. Ethical perception of business practitioners by general public is low compared to other professions (Batchelor, Harris, Gibson, &

Simpson, 2011). In specific, some consultants in New York lack professional skills required for success in the competitive auto sales business environment.

1.4 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore skills required by some consultants for success within the competitive auto sales business environment beyond the first five years. A purposeful sample of 20 consultants who worked in New York for same dealership up to five years was interviewed to collect data. Results of the study may assist consultants to identify skills required for success within the competitive auto sales business environments thereby decreasing current high turnover rate. Information from findings may result to decrease the high rate of auto sales consultant's turnover rate, increase viability of auto dealership, jobs retention rates, revenue and cause reduction of unemployment. Data from this study may facilitate survive business in the competitive auto sales business environment by consultants.

1.5 Nature of the Study

For this study, we used a qualitative method with an exploratory case study design. Qualitative method was most suitable for this study than the quantitative or mixed methods as the study did not involve used of numerical data or statistical extrapolations (Thomas, 2011). Data collection for this study was through qualitative interviews with twenty participants. The case study design approach helps researchers construct the in-depth understanding of a complex problem in its environment (Alex, Naslund, & Jasmand, 2012; Crowe et al., 2011). Case study is useful to researchers for clarifying findings in their study (Welford, Murphy, & Casey, 2012). For this study we used the qualitative multiple case study.

1.6 Research Question

For this study overarching research question was: What basic skills do consultants in NYC use to succeed beyond 5 years in business within the competitive auto sales business environment?

1.7 Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework for this study was the Knowledge-Based View (KBV) theory of the firm. The KBV originated from a perspective which extends Resource-Based View (RBV) initially advanced by Penrose (1959) and subsequently expanded by Wernerfelt (1984) and Barney (1991), etc. The KBV is a management approach for understanding firm heterogeneity, and how firms can differentiate themselves from competitors to gain sustainable competitive advantage (Grant, 1996). In line with the RBV, products and services by firms using tangible resources are functions of their expertise (Samiha & Triki, 2011).

The KBV considers knowledge as a strategic resource that does not depreciate in the same way as traditional economic productive factors because of the capacity to generate increasing returns (Wang, He, & Mahoney, 2009). Knowledge is a significant asset of an organization that is also a key factor of success (Bohn, 1994). Knowledge-based resources include technical skills, technical knowledge, expertise and experience (Chiou, 2015). Collection of intellectual assets, consisting knowledge, information, intellectual property rights and experience, may facilitate wealth creation, value and competitive advantages for a firm. Chiou (2015) suggested that intellectual assets include possession of knowledge, experience, technical skills, customer relationship and professional skills that facilitates competitive advantages. According to Glaserfelt (1988) each individual has to re-create his or her own reality and capacity to act through experience.

1.8 Operational Definitions

Automobile dealerships. Automobile dealerships are the real estate that the automotive industry uses to sell its products (Carter, 2015).

Competitive advantage. Competitive advantage is the benefit an organization has over competitors in the form of a low cost provider or differentiation (Calandro, 2011).

Dealer. A dealer is the individual, individuals, or legal entities who owns and operates automobile dealerships (Carter, 2015).

Front Desks. A front desk is the slightly elevated podium of a typical auto showroom.

1.9 Assumptions

Assumptions are conditions in research assumed as truth researchers take for granted (Polit & Beck, 2004). We assumed that participants for this study would give comprehensively honest and thoughtful responses. Additional assumption was that sample size for this study adequately represents auto sales consultants and dealerships population throughout NYC. The choice of research design and methodological approach diminished the effect of these likely problems.

1.10 Limitations

Limitations are external conditions restrictive to scope with potential to influence outcome of a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). First, current study location limited the convenient sample and results may not generalize to other populations. Location was heterogeneous with medium population density and results may not apply to areas with either low or high population densities. In addition, participants may have relied on memory recollections and participant's information could be perceived truth. However, focus of qualitative researches is to understand events rather than generalize results (Kolb, 2012; Mistarihi, Al Refai, Al Qaid, & Qeed, 2012). We addressed study limitation, through rich, thick description and analysis. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) suggested that researchers use of limitations and delimitations for identifying inherent weaknesses with potential to affect transferability of the study's outcomes.

1.11 Significance of the Study

1.11.1 Contribution to Business Practice

Competition is a reason why some businesses experience decline (Hemphill & Perry, 2012). Most consultants love their jobs and have no difficulty motivating themselves for work daily (Harding, 1994). According to Harding (1994), some organizations endeavor to provide consultants the needed basic skills. Nevertheless, consultants receive bad press, portraying them as holding excessive power and having more interest in sell on than any current deliberation (Howcroft & Light, 2010). Unfavorable press translates to bad perception of auto sale consultants leading to less sales, reduced profitability and high exit. Exploration of basic sales skill and practices may help determine professional skills required by consultants to overcome bad reputations and succeed in the competitive auto sales business environment. According to Gaebler (2011), successful consultants should be able to describe in one sentence exact service offers in terms that potential clients understands. Most consultants need skills to build self-confidence for success with prospects in sales business (Harding, 1994). Factors responsible for sales performance include sales skills and organizational variables (Yakasai & Jan, 2015).

Knowledge from this study may facilitate economic empowerment, expansion of knowledge for auto sales management, and establish profitability of dealership businesses. High rate of voluntary turnover among auto salespeople has been a challenge for leaders in automobile dealerships who have had to deal with decline in sales, profits, productivity and repeat customer service (Davieson, 2011). New knowledge regarding auto sales consultant's professional skills from this study may lead to improved

and effective auto sales skills resulting to lowered turnover. Lowered turnover rate could translate to a higher dealership business success. By understanding effective skill process and management from sales people's perspective, this study adds a new dimension to the views on sales management (Goebel, Deeter-Schmelz, & Kennedy, 2013). The results may contribute to business practices with information on sales skills for success critical for auto sales consultants and dealerships for success beyond 5 years.

1.11.2 Implications for Social Change

Boyd (2011) suggested that business downturn affects jobs, families and communities. Circumstances such as bad locations, low demand for products, lack of knowledge, competition, and lack of skills influence business success (Cant & Wiid, 2013). Results provide new insights into how auto sales practitioners may succeed in business beyond 5 years. Auto sales consultants may survive competition and succeed in business by adopting new skills from information in this study. Sales consultants are responsible for sales and services which results into dealership success, survival and profitability. Hau (2013) posited that consultants typically assume the roles of agent, secretary, bookkeeper, and sales representative. Consultants help to define how problem and solution are framed, assist with identification of new functionality, and influence project size and scope (Howcroft & Light, 2010).

Voluntary turnover of sales practitioner's costs dealerships indirectly and directly in loss of repeat customers, knowledge and volume of sales usually by experienced salespeople (Davieson, 2011). Skilled and efficient auto sales consultants contribute to viability and success of auto dealership businesses in general. Successful auto dealerships contribute to economic growth through job creation and total production output. Owners of successful auto dealership may continue to provide employment to employees who depend upon these jobs for their livelihood (Boyd, 2011). Information from this research is valuable to determine skills for successful auto sales consultancy benefiting communities through salvaged dealerships businesses and sustained auto sales professional careers. Successful businesses have the potentials for contribution to economic empowerment in the communities. Economic empowerment enables individuals to fulfill their dreams of financial security and enhancing quality of life in the society. Viable and successful auto businesses benefit society and the economy in general.

1.12 *A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature*

1.12.1 Knowledge Based Resources

Knowledge is the range of an individual's understanding that would describe an awareness of evidence, understanding of evidence, and steps required to practice in evidence based manner (Glegg & Holsti, 2010). Knowledge is the capacity-to act possibly with consciousness (Sveiby, 1997). Knowledge-based resources offer accumulation of skills or professional knowledge, that makes implementation smoother and efficient (Von Hippel, 1998). Choices and diverse uses for resources over time are determined by administrative decisions (Penrose, 1959). Brahma and Chakraborty (2011) suggested that firms are assemblages of both tangible and intangible resources. Intangible resources are non-physical assets which business practitioners utilize to improve their businesses (Yallwe & Buscemi, 2014). Jugdev and Mathur (2013) argued that intangible, knowledge-based factors are sources of competitive advantage (Jugdev & Mathur, 2013).

Knowledge, expertise, intellectual assets, and competencies are significant factors of superior business in the information Age (De Luca, Maia, Cardoso, de Vasconcelos, & da Cunha, 2014). According to De Luca et al. (2014), competitive firms consider superior performance as significantly critical and make it a priority. Knowledge is a vital resource of a firm which increases with use over time while material resources decrease with usage (Akaeze, 2016). Understanding of knowledge as a resource

forms theoretical link between the RBV and KBV. In conformity with RBV, practitioners manage business with diverse resourceful skills resulting to the differences in performance across firms (Musso & Francioni, 2012). The choice of KBV over RBV of a firm for this study is because knowledge is the critical strategic resource with KBV of the firm. A critical KBV general notion is that organization exists to generate, transfer, and convert knowledge into competitive advantage (Samiha & Triki, 2011). Knowledge-based resources are sum of the accumulation of professional knowledge, professional skills, the experience of solving problems and the external relationships that can create value for the organization (Chiou, 2015). Wang, Lee and Chiu (2012) suggested that knowledge-based resources are the sum of the unseen knowledge and ability that can bring value and competitive advantages for the organization. These resources not only create value for the organization but also strengthen its competitive advantages. In line with the KBV, managers enhance a firm's capacity to produce efficiently by updating or advancing knowledge (Nickerson & Zenger, 2004). The potentials of an organization are the combination of diverse knowledge bases that are composite bundles of skills and accumulative knowledge, through organizational procedure that guarantee superior business performance (Akaeze, 2016). Competitors find knowledge as the only resource difficult to imitate whereas, technology, capital, market share, or product resources are easier to copy.

1.12.2 Overview of Auto Industry

According to Automobile dealers (2016), dealers worldwide generate over \$2 trillion in annual revenue. Leading countries for auto sales includes US, Japan, and the nations of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC). Chinese automotive market, almost three times larger than three other BRIC nations combined based on unit sales (Automobile dealers, 2016). The U.S. automobile industry began with Henry Ford starting mass production of cars by implementing the moving assembly line. According to Sussan and Kassira (2006), the strength of U.S. automotive industry was based on leading in mass-production techniques.

The US automobile dealer industry includes about 46,000 establishments (single-location companies and units of multi-location companies) with combined annual revenue of about \$840 billion (Automobile dealers, 2016). Major divisions of U.S. automobile industry include manufacturing and trading sub divisions. Trading division comprises of both vehicles and parts dealerships owned by individuals or groups. Companies in automobile industry engage in retail sales of new and used passenger cars, light trucks, Sport Utility Vehicle (SUVs), passengers and cargo vans. National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA) determined the number of franchised new car dealerships peaked at approximately 49,200 since 1949 (Carter, 2015). However, after 1949 number of dealerships continuously declined to about 17,838 at the end of 2013 (Carter, 2015).

1.12.3 How Dealership Franchises Work

From the creation of automotive industry, manufacturers handle design, production, and brand promotion of vehicles. Consequently and in acknowledgment that sale of vehicles prompt demand for corollary services like leasing, financing, maintenance, and repairs, retail distribution is done through a network of independent dealers (Carter, 2015). Independent dealers secure exclusive franchises for specified locations and act as representatives of producer to vehicle-buying public. Carter (2015) suggested that the trade locality that a franchisee has exclusive rights over is usually a radius of about 10 miles but may differ by state. Automobile manufacturers grant franchises to auto dealers free of charge as an agreement to the effective partnership process of marketing auto vehicles. While dealers may sell their dealership to willing buyers under a negotiated buy-sell agreement, franchises are not transferable.

In late 2013, there were a total of 31,440 approved franchises to dealers who could market from about 17,838 dealerships in the U.S. (Carter, 2015). For dealerships where multiple brands are marketed, the prospective dealers may apply for franchises from multiple manufacturers. Approvals usually depend on dealers clearly showing adequate industry experience and compelling financial backing. However, industry's recent prosperity attracted buyers with little or no background in automotive industry. A conventional arrangement which commonly benefit a new dealer with limited capital is for the new franchisee to lease dealership property from previous operator.

1.12.4 Dealership Organizational Structure

Understanding management styles helps to explain how decisions are made in face of major challenges and opportunities in marketplace ultimately determining success or failure of an organization (Trask, Rice, Anchors, & Lilieholm, 2009). A typical auto dealership comprises of service and sales departments headed by a Senior Service Manager (SSM) and General Sales Manager (GSM) respectively. The GSM and SSM typically reports to a General Manager (GM) employed by the dealers to manage the entire business. Sales department is responsible for vehicle sales while services department is charged with after sales and vehicle maintenance services. Sales department consists of front desk, sales offices, finance offices, and show rooms. In most dealerships, GM's employ Sales Managers (SM) charged with managing daily sales activities, procedures and process. With the approval of GM's, SMs usually hire and fire auto sales consultants to follow process and sell vehicles from dealership inventory.

1.12.5 Management and Leadership Styles of Automobile Dealerships Business

Management styles are methods executives use when making critical business management decisions (Trask, Rice, Anchors, & Lilieholm, 2009). Leadership practice does not only focus on what people do, but how and why they do it (Singh, 2013). Depending on the tasks organizations want to accomplish different types of leadership in work environments include Autocratic, Bureaucratic, Democratic, Laissez-Faire, and Paternalistic styles (ElKhouly, Ossman, Selim, & Zaghloul, 2014). Some organizations implement mixed leadership styles based on tasks they need completed, advantage and disadvantage of each leadership styles toward achieving goals (ElKhouly et al., 2014). Auto dealerships management styles are usually a mixed styled leadership. Most privately owned dealerships are owned by one man or a few individuals whose interests and needs are often inseparable from dealership goals. The prevailing leadership style for privately owned dealerships is Autocratic leadership with a few practicing Transactional leadership styles. These leadership styles reflects in staffing policies of hire and fire, lack of adequate trainings and sometimes varied systemic discrimination policies. Leadership style determines the culture and goals of organizations (ElKhouly et al., 2014). Prevailing leadership styles for larger groups like publicly traded companies is a mixture of styles depending on goals of investors and group owners. Common leadership practices within large dealership involve Autocratic, Bureaucratic and Laissez Faire Leadership styles.

The GM's perform major functions of managing the entire dealerships while other managers report to him. Five major functions common to all managers includes: planning, organizing, leading, staffing and controlling (Trask, Rice, Anchors, & Lilieholm, 2009). As part of staffing function, GM's source and employ qualified GSM, SSM, and SM's (Front desk managers). Conventional dealership consists of a GSM and a SSM with a number of front desk managers depends on the size of auto dealerships. All managers plan, organize, lead, staff, train and control in a conventional dealership. Managers hire and fire sales consultants charged with the task of following dealership process and procedures to source, sell, close and deliver sales deals to earn profit with happy customers.

1.12.6 Sales Skills

Skill refers to application of knowledge to perform any given task (Glegg & Holsti, 2010). Professional sales skills are critical to organizational success (Combs, 2013). Salespeople's skills, knowledge and motivation may negatively impact organizational strategies to support sales force autonomy (Pettijohn, Schaefer, & Burnett, 2014). Sales people's insufficient skills, knowledge and motivation reduce their ability to adequately perform sales jobs. Pettijohn et al. (2014) recommended an accompanying strategy which includes training salespeople for necessary skill, knowledge and motivation to enhance sales force autonomy. Salespeople are then able to use acquired skills to support organizations knowledge for obtaining information on consumer's needs (Le Meunier-FitzHugh, Baumann, Palmer, & Wilson, 2011).

Sales people with significant level of skills, training and autonomy are referred to as auto sales consultants in the auto sales sector. Competitiveness is a critical trait of successful salespeople, who demonstrate a set of skills regarding performance of interpersonal relations (Donassolo & de Matos, 2014). Desire to win and better others in competition is a satisfaction salespeople derive when competing with other salespeople. Successful salespeople are individuals who stay in the path of victory and propelled by a desire to exceed in performance (Donassolo & de Matos, 2014). Salespeople are largely responsible for generating that profitable performance which organizations require from employees (Pettijohn et al., 2014). Customers positively express their satisfaction to other potential customers and return to same establishment if organization meets their needs. To customer, salespeople's ability to listen along using skills such as empathy, customer focus, and problem solving are critical (Kennedy, 2006). Ukabuilu and Igbojekwe (2015) posited that customers pay a fair price for products or services when businesses satisfy their needs. Fair prices result in profit which in turn results to sustainable organizations (Ukabuilu & Igbojekwe, 2015). In addition, where customers are not sure of their needs or hesitant to spend time to identify them, salespeople are expected to possess ability to obtain customers' priorities and generate knowledge (Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al., 2011).

Successful salespeople develop a range of skills to initiate and sustain effective relationships with customers, including explaining benefits of offers, providing professional advice, and acting as intermediary between firm and customers (Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al., 2011). Acquisition of sales-related skills and knowledge is crucial to organizational sales success (Pettijohn et al., 2014). Five basic skills essential to salespeople at all levels include customer contact, customer engagement, negotiation and closing, information and activity management, and business skills (Dugdale & Jarvis, 2014). Also, interpersonal skills positively influence salesperson performance (Ahmad, Basir, & Kitchen, 2010). Salespeople may develop more skill through training and managerial activities (Pettijohn et al., 2014).

1.12.7 Automobile Sales in the United States

In 1913 Sir Henry Ford executed the moving assembly line to begin mass production of cars in United States (Heffernan, 2003; Sussan & Kassira, 2006). The U.S. automobiles market is the largest in the world (Banerji & Sambharya, 1996). Strength of automotive industry in the U.S. was based on leadership in mass-production techniques. In 1965, the original U.S. Big Three automakers General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler had a combined market share of 90.6% of the U.S. automobile market (Low, Rafai, & Taylor, 2010). The Big Three dominated U.S. domestic market, car production and was the driving force for auto industry (Sussan & Kassira, 2006).

In 1997 there was an uneven decline in market share of the big three automakers to only 70% of U.S. market. From 1997 to 2009, the Big Three experienced a constant steep loss in combined market share

to only 43.7%. In particular the economic recession between 2008 and 2009 caused a sharp drop in auto sales for automakers, with a consequence that forced both GM and Chrysler bankruptcy in 2009 (Low et al., 2010). Nevertheless, U.S. accounts for about 60 percent of total car and light truck production (Sussan & Kassira, 2006). The automotive industry problem between 2008 and 2010 was a part of a global financial crisis which impacted U.S., European, and other automobile manufacturers (Chen, 2011). Between 2005 and 2008, the Big Three accrued losses of approximately \$100 billion, even after firing over 300,000 employees (Ingrassia, 2011). In 2008 Ford, General Motors (GM) and Chrysler faced financial ruin. By 2010, GM and Chrysler filed for bankruptcy despite borrowing almost \$80 billion dollars in government-backed loans.

Ford, Chrysler, and GM ignored American consumers' desires for gas efficiency and continued focus on Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) and light trucks (Bezdecheck, 2011). Consequently, sales of new car fell to a 25 years record U.S. low level (Bezdecheck, 2011). By June 1, 2009, GM filed for bankruptcy (Ingrassia, 2011). Ford replaced the chief executive officers, abandoned vehicle brands responsible for revenue losses and leveraged everything to avoid bankruptcy (Ingrassia, 2011). GM, Chrysler, their dealerships, and employees profited from the government bailout profiting since and currently solvent. Ford motor was the only big three U.S. auto company that survived and did not receive the government bailout money. Direct cost for government bailout of GM and Chrysler was \$78.9 billion (Hopkins, 2009). Additional \$7.5 billion government backed loans went to General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC) resulting to savings of \$500 million/year in bond interest costs to GMAC (McNulty & Wisner, 2014). The government sponsored Cash for Clunkers program in 2009 costing taxpayers approximately \$3 billion that converted to approximately \$10,700 in subsidies per vehicle in two years (Hopkins, 2009). Government lost approximately \$11.7 billion shares in both GM and Chrysler and gave additional \$1 billion to settle United Auto Workers (UAW) pensions (Zywicki, 2014).

2. Method

2.1 Research Method

Research method for this study was qualitative research. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the inference participants make as justification for experiences (Farquhar, Ewing, & Booth, 2011; Snyder, 2011; Seidman, 2012). Qualitative researchers explore experience-as-lived in natural environments and routine life (Flynbjerg, 2011; Patton, 2014; Wahyuni, 2012). Focus of this study was exploration of skills some auto sales consultants in NYC use for success working at same dealership beyond five years. Qualitative studies are valuable to researchers for understanding social dynamics and businesses with focus on traditions, principles, ethics, values, philosophies and behavioral patterns (Bloor, Sampson, Baker, & Dahlgren, 2013). We selected qualitative method because it is appropriate for data collection consisting of words rather than numbers (Castellan, 2010).

2.2 Research Design

For this qualitative study, we used a qualitative case study design. Qualitative case study design approach involves analysis of meaning and explanation of experiences and circumstances within particular settings (Moustakas, 1994). Case study research design enables researchers to identify real-life decisions which individuals made in the context of a chosen phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Researchers may use qualitative case study designs rather than quantitative designs to explore participant's interpretation of phenomenon (Saxena, Gupta, & Ruohonen, 2012). We used a case study

design for this study to explore participants experiences about skills required for success consultants within the competitive auto sales business environment.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments are tactics which researchers use to collect data from research participants (Shea, Grinde, & Elmslie, 2011). Qualitative researchers are the primary data collection instrument. (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Yin, 2011). For this study we were primary data collection instrument as the interviewers. De Fina and Perrino (2011) argued that interviews are common cross-disciplinary research instrument which researchers in different fields effectively use as research techniques either alone or in combination with other techniques. Unlike other forms of surveys or studies, Interviews enable interviewer to make observations with great insights (Yin, 2014). Semi-structured interview guide is researcher-created and consists of open-ended questions to facilitate data collection (Schatz, 2012). Esling and Agon (2012) recommended semistructured interviews, examination of existing documents, and participant observations as data collection instruments.

Open-ended questions enables interviewers and interviewees discourse subject of study comprehensively thereby explaining the phenomenon under study (Broderick, Wright, & Kristiansen, 2011; Qu & Dumay, 2011). For this study, the secondary instrument for collection of data was open-ended semistructured interview. Open-ended questions encourage interviewees to give clear responses with the possibility to broadly explain at same time (Broderick, Wright, & Kristiansen, 2011; Qu & Dumay 2011; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interview guide enhanced the quality and credibility of instruments in this study. Researchers use interview guide for accomplishing data collection and to improve dependability of a case study (Yin, 2014). Credible data collection process is steady and consistent (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). For this study, we used the same interview guide and questions for all participants thereby enhancing study's confirmability, dependability, and credibility.

2.4 Data Collection Technique

For this study, we created an interview guide consisting of open-ended research questions. We used digital voice recorder to record each participant's responses and continued interviews as long as participants were willing to disclose additional information. We set each interview sessions to last approximately one hour. The data collection process continued until reaching validation of data saturation. Data collection was in form of sentences and phrases representing the verbal responses of participants to interview questions. We used member checking for establishing accuracy and reliability of this qualitative research (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Upon interviews, member checking allowed all participants the opportunity to validate the accuracy of our interpretations of their responses (Harper & Cole, 2012).

2.5 Data Organization Technique

Journals consists notes which researchers write during interviews, including categories of the meanings they ascribed to participants' responses (Hayman et al., 2012). Reflective journaling was suitable and facilitated in-depth exploration of participants experiences (Davies, Reitmaier, Smith, & Mangan-Danckwart, 2013; Hayman et al., 2012; Slotnick & Janesick, 2011). A reflective journal was appropriate to take notes during interviews (Shek & Wu, 2013). We saved data in a home office 5 years before final destruction by shredding of hard copies and erasing of electronic data.

2.6 Data Analysis

In line with Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis was qualitative analytic method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data collection. Nvivo trademarks software facilitated thematic coding and grouping of raw data in the analysis stage (Bergin, 2011). Nvivo trademarks software

program facilitated the search and identification themes within study data collection. We used methodological triangulation for data analysis process in the research design for this study. In methods triangulation, the multiple methods of data collection are crucial for articulating extensive review on a phenomenon (Cope, 2014).

The data from semistructured interviews was useful for validating data from the dealership documents and journal notes from the observation during interviews in this study. In line with Cao (2011) we applied methodological triangulation to confirm reliability and validity for this study. For this study conceptual framework was based in the KBV of the firm. The KBV is useful for understanding firm heterogeneity, and how firms can differentiate themselves from competitors to gain sustainable competitive advantage (Grant, 1996). In line with RBV, products and services by firms using tangible resources are functions of their expertise (Samiha & Triki, 2011). We used verbatim quotes from participants to back analysis of research data (Richards & Morse, 2013).

2.7 Reliability and Validity

A basic challenge in qualitative research is proving reliability and trust in judgment of the researcher to interpret the phenomenon under study (Whiting & Sines, 2012). Credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability are four criteria constituting the framework for determining rigors of research in a qualitative study (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). We maintained an audit trail to enhance credibility of the study. To enhance transferability, we detailed original context of this research through thick description to allow other researchers reach informed decisions (Houghton et al., 2013).

We addressed all study problems through our choice of research method, design and interpreting of data to eliminate the risks. To maintain reliability in the study, we avoided using any leading questions, and gave participants the space to answer questions freely. Research questionnaire was validated through interviewing the interviewer method (Akaeze, 2016). To enhance internal validity, we established chain of evidence in the data collection phase, by using notes and journals. To establish the transferability in this study, we defined the scope, boundaries, and use purposeful sampling.

3. Result

This section contains outline of the three major themes that emerged from exploring study's data. We identified We identified three critical skills that consultants required for success within the competitive auto sales business environment in NYC. Three major themes related to professional skills which auto sales consultants in NYC used to succeed in business beyond the first five years included (a) Technical knowledge, (b) interpersonal, and (c) Salesmanship skills. Data analysis aligned with KBV, the conceptual framework for this study.

Data analysis involved identifying and evaluating themes related to auto sales skills such as Product Knowledge, Rapport building, Active listening, Communication, Qualification questioning, Time management, Overcoming objections, Demo skills, Committing customers, Closing skills, After sales relationship. The themes from data analysis are related to the KBV of firm for gaining sustainable competitive advantage. The research question was further broken into ten interview questions to address sales skills. In accordance with O'Reilly and Parker (2013), we reached data saturation when additional reviews of the interview data, organizational documents, and participant observation notes yielded no additional information.

4. Discussion

4.1 Recommendations for Action

Three recommended steps for action identified from this study may benefit current and future auto sales consultants for improved business skills, performance, sustainability and growth. Existing and aspiring auto sales consultants should focus on improving Technical knowledge Skills, Interpersonal skills, and Salesmanship Skills. Information from participants showed that an improved sales process is significant for success within the competitive auto sale business environment. Business professionals are not sufficiently benefiting from value creation opportunities related to their intangible assets such as knowledge (Laihonen & Lonqvist, 2010). Participants provided valuable insights into their knowledge management processes, procedures, and practices along with perceptions of critical capabilities needed for future success.

Findings indicated that demonstrating strong knowledge and expertise of products and services is critical for developing positive customer experience that induces trust within the customer. According to O'Neil (1998), the tangible payback of product knowledge is growing shareholder value, a problem solved, a product sold. Salesmanship skills are useful for creating demand for the goods which results to increase in production. Fu and Elliott (2013) found a positive effect of product knowledge on consumers' willingness to pay, which is not mediated by purchase intention. Sales consultants must receive adequate training to enhance skills leading to improved performance, sales and revenue.

Wilson, Strutton and Farris (2002) suggested that sales training provide salespeople with requisite knowledge such as product knowledge, market and competitive information, company policies, procedures and selling skills. Product training with the sales staff representatives served to enhance product knowledge (Pierce, Petersen, & Meadows, 2011). Use of Technical knowledge, Interpersonal, and Salesmanship skills could help NYC consultants improve performance and process to increase income, customer retention, product demand, job satisfaction, and stability auto sales competitive business.

4.2 Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to explore professional skills required by some auto sales consultants in NYC for success within a competitive business environment beyond first five years. Findings showed that some skills that were crucial to succeed in auto sales competitive business environment. Future quantitative studies may reveal a different view to significance of these skills to growth and sustainability of auto sales consultancy business. Focus was on sales professionals consulting for auto dealership business in NYC.

A valuable recommendation for further study is to explore how factors such as age, education, and prior business experience affect success of auto sales consultants. Further study using sales professionals from auto dealership in different geographical location within the U.S. may provide useful information. Future researchers may analyze this study to further research and inquiry into knowledge of the auto sales consultant business success. Results of more research considering other variables, would reveal a comprehensive analysis of business success to auto sales consultants.

4.3 Conclusions

In the U.S. auto dealerships account for up to 8 percent of all retail employment with states earning approximately 20 percent of all sales taxes from auto dealers (Canis & Platzer, 2009; Lafontaine & Morton, 2010). Between 2011 and 2012 the U.S. GDP hit up to 4.5 percent with the auto production and sales contributing up to 0.5 percentage point to GDP growth, or about 16 percent of total growth (Chu & Su, 2010). Sales personnel are most essential asset of any organization (Yakasai & Jan, 2015). In

particular, sales people are responsible for generating the revenues for sustaining every committed organization.

The problem is that some auto sales in the U.S. lack the professional skills required to perform efficiently and sustain business beyond 5 years. This leads to a high turnover rate of auto sales consultants that cost dealerships to lose money. Automobile sale consultants' voluntary turnover rate is approximately 34.7% costing about \$75,000 per salesperson in annual total cost to automobile dealerships in the United States of America (Davieson, 2011). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore skills required by some consultants in New York for success within the competitive auto sales business environment beyond first five years. Findings may serve as the basis for the development of process for auto sales business sector to achieve economic growth in the U.S. Results could become a guide for consultants who are struggling with successful skills and practices required improving performance and surviving competitive auto sales market environment.

We conducted semistructured interviews to gain insights of skills which auto sales professionals used to succeed beyond first 5 years. Participants in this study were 20 auto sales consultants' business practitioners employed for up to 5 years in same dealership within NYC. The conceptual framework for this study was the KBV theory of firm. Data collection had 19 emergent themes morphed into three major categories (a) Technical knowledge, (b) interpersonal, and (c) Salesmanship skills. Responses from participants indicated that Technical knowledge skills such as product knowledge were pivotal to improved performance, survival and success of consultants in auto sales business.

Therefore for success sales consultants possess Technical Knowledge skills such as Knowledge of customers market and products, their own organization's procedures, competitor's products, services and sales practices, product line, including product features and benefits, customers' operations, such as store and shelf layout, and employee training.

Next is interpersonal skill like building cordial relationships with customers facilitate the retention of existing customers and gaining new consumers by the auto sales professional consultants. Participants submitted that salesmanship skills including ability to express oneself, ability to control, regulate nonverbal displays of emotion enabled them to succeed and continue to survive in auto sales business. Abilities to present oneself socially, possibly through acting and manipulate others to control the situation were pivotal to the success of auto sales consultancy as revealed by the participants which contributes to success. Additionally, participants revealed that understanding the verbal communications of others was a critical skill which they used to remain in business for up to than 5 years.

Participants provided insights into the professional skills which consultants need to succeed beyond 5 years in competitive auto sales business. The results may be guide for auto sales consultants who are struggling to survive and improve on their skills and practices. Implication for positive social change includes the potential to reduce auto sale professionals turn over, unemployment and crime rates. Recommendation consists of skills that may benefit existing and potential auto sales professionals for improving skills, performance, revenue growth and sustenance. Findings could provide consultants with practical guide to change auto sales practices thereby improving their skills to promote sustainability and growth.

4.4 Applications to Professional Practice

Business practitioners can learn how to increase business sustainability by acquiring knowledge from other business practitioners (Chimucheka, 2013). In line with conceptual framework, knowledge is most strategic resource to facilitate competitive advantage when strategically used and expressed in skills (Barney, 1991; Penrose, 1959). Results may help managers identify professional skills required by

consultants to sustain business in a competitive auto sales market environment. The findings and recommendations might serve as the basis for consultants to adopt skills leading to changes in operations. Change in operations mat could result to improved performance, profit for dealerships and development of the auto sales business sector of the U.S. economy. The results may become a guide for existing and potential auto sales consultants striving for survival within competitive auto sales business. Results may also help managers identify the skills required by their sales force for training purposes and success within the competitive business environment. The findings and recommendations added to knowledge of business management by identifying the significance of sales business skills. Consultants with similar aims could benefit from using knowledge based resources of technical, interpersonal, and salesmanship skills to improve performance processes and sustain business within competitive auto sales business environment.

4.5 Implications for Social Change

Having the right business knowledge increases a business practitioner's chance of survival with improved profitability (Mavunga, 2014). Successful consultants contribute to strengthen U.S. economy through improved skills leading to high sales performance that translates to profitability, growth of dealerships, and auto sales business sector. We expect that knowledge advanced in this study would (a) aid auto sales consultants with skills required to work within competitive market environments, (b) facilitate training of aspiring and existing auto sales consultants in improving sales performance, process and marketing for success. Additionally knowledge from this study includes suggestion on successful skills leading to sustainable employment for auto sales consultants and the entire community.

Information from this study could affect social change through reduction in unemployment and crime rates when consultants use data to improve sales skills. Successful auto sales consultancy could enhance economic empowerment within the urban communities of NYC. Salesmanship helps in creating demand for the goods which results to increase in production. Also, increase in sales helps to improve profit and encourages business activities which provide more employment and higher income for the community. Consumers benefit from salesmen providing them useful information. Economic empowerment facilitates realization of home ownership dreams by residents and financial security thereby increasing the citizen's quality of life.

4.6 Literature Gaps

Human capital is theoretically and empirically linked to business performance (Đekic, 2015; Samad, 2013). Human capital pertains to individuals knowledge and abilities that allow for changes in action and economic growth (Samad, 2013). Formal training and education are among approaches or mechanism of human capital development (Đekic, 2015). Firm specific human capital including skills and knowledge are valuable for firm performance and competitive advantages (Samad, 2013; Vinogradov & Isaksen, 2008). Few studies exist that answers the question on skills required by some consultants to improve performance and sustain business beyond 5 years within competitive auto sales in NYC.

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