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Importance of ethical behavior in sales organizations

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Abstract

The study explores the critical role of ethical behavior within sales organizations, highlighting its impact on trust, reputation, and sustainability. With increasing scrutiny from regulatory bodies and customers, ethical practices have become essential in mitigating legal risks, fostering long-term client relationships, and maintaining a positive corporate image. The research investigates the multifaceted effects of ethical behavior, including its influence on organizational culture, employee motivation, and adherence to legal frameworks. Through qualitative methodologies, the study delves into the ethical dilemmas faced by sales professionals, the organizational factors shaping their conduct, and the implications of ethical or unethical practices on customer loyalty and brand reputation. Additionally, it examines the alignment of ethical behavior with corporate social responsibility, emphasizing its broader societal impact. By addressing gaps in current literature, this research provides actionable insights for fostering an ethical culture within sales teams and enhancing compliance with industry regulations. Ultimately, the findings aim to equip organizations with strategies to build sustainable and ethically sound sales environments.

Keywords: Customer Loyalty; Organizational Culture; Corporate Social Responsibility; Legal Compliance; Reputation Management; Employee Motivation; Ethical Dilemmas.

1 Introduction

Sales organizations play a vital role in navigating the dynamic corporate environment, which is marked by escalating intricacy, worldwide interconnectedness, and swift technology progress. In the present dynamic context, the practice of ethical behavior has emerged as a fundamental element in fostering trust and ensuring sustained achievements. The process entails engaging in sales activities characterized by integrity, honesty, and devotion to moral standards. This method not only establishes a fundamental basis for upholding a favorable reputation but also aids in cultivating long-lasting client relationships.

The understanding of the potential negative consequences associated with unethical conduct has emerged as a significant motivator for the emphasis on ethical behavior inside sales companies. Instances of unethical conduct, such as the utilization of deceitful sales strategies, dissemination of misleading advertisements, or manipulation of customers, have attracted considerable scrutiny from regulatory agencies, media outlets, and the general public. These occurrences have the potential to negatively impact the reputation of a firm, result in legal ramifications, and ultimately reduce revenue.

Trust is a fundamental element of any successful business relationship. Ethical behavior in sales organizations is pivotal in earning and maintaining the trust of customers, partners, and stakeholders. Ethical sales professionals are more likely to build lasting relationships based on trust, as they consistently deliver on their promises and act in the best interests of their clients. Sales organizations must operate within the boundaries of the law and adhere to industry regulations. Unethical behavior can lead to legal repercussions, including fines and lawsuits (Brown and Dacin, 1997). The

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significance of ethical behavior lies in the avoidance of such legal pitfalls and the maintenance of a company's license to operate. An ethical work environment enhances employee morale and satisfaction. When sales professionals are encouraged to act ethically and know that their organization supports these principles, they are more likely to feel engaged and motivated. Ethical behavior sets a positive cultural tone within the sales organization. Ethical behavior contributes significantly to customer loyalty.

When customers believe that a sales organization operates with their best interests at heart, they are more likely to make repeat purchases and recommend the company to others. Long-term customer loyalty is a key driver of sustainable revenue. Sales organizations, like all businesses, have a role to play in the broader community. Ethical behavior extends to responsible corporate citizenship, including philanthropic efforts and sustainable business practices. Such initiatives can enhance the organization's image and create a positive social impact. Ethical behavior in sales organizations is not only a matter of morality but also a business imperative. The background and significance of ethical conduct within the sales industry underscore the multifaceted advantages it brings, ranging from building trust, ensuring legal compliance, and fostering employee satisfaction to cultivating customer loyalty and contributing to social responsibility. This chapter serves as a foundation for the comprehensive exploration of ethical behavior in sales organizations, which were further examined in subsequent chapters, employing qualitative research methods to gain insights from sales professionals and or

1.1 Research Rationale

It is important to comprehend the underlying reasoning behind undertaking research on the significance of ethical conduct within sales firms in order to substantiate the importance of this study. This section presents a comprehensive examination of the primary motivations behind undertaking this research endeavor. Sales personnel frequently face a multitude of ethical dilemmas in the course of their daily operations. The aforementioned challenges encompass the pressure to achieve sales targets, the allure of misrepresenting items or services, and the complexities involved in negotiating the ethical ambiguities of bargaining (Beu and Buckley, 2001). Developing successful solutions to manage and minimize these difficulties necessitates a full grasp of them.

The ethical conduct inside sales companies is not exclusively contingent upon individual decision-making, but rather significantly shaped by the prevailing company culture. Examining the correlation between the cultural aspects of an organization and the ethical conduct displayed by its sales force can provide valuable insights into the various factors that either enable or impede ethical behavior. Consequently, this can provide insights for devising approaches to establish a sales atmosphere that adheres to ethical principles.

The importance of ethical conduct inside sales organizations is emphasized by its direct influence on an organization's reputation and the establishment of trust with consumers. The maintenance of a positive image and client loyalty is contingent upon the adherence to ethical sales practices. The investigation conducted in this field can yield valuable knowledge regarding the impact of ethical behavior on an organization's brand and its relationships with customers (Vitell and Hunt, 1990). Sales firms are required to adhere to legal and regulatory frameworks. Neglecting to adhere to this practice can result in legal ramifications, monetary penalties, and detrimental effects on an entity's functioning. Conducting an inquiry into the correlation between ethical conduct and adherence to pertinent rules and regulations can assist firms in mitigating legal risks and safeguarding their operational licenses.

The ethical climate within a sales firm exerts a significant influence on the overall welfare and motivation of sales personnel. When employees perceive that their firm places importance on and actively encourages ethical conduct, they are inclined to exhibit higher levels of motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction (Anderson and Narus, 1990). Investigating this correlation is crucial in order to improve staff morale and performance. In an epoch characterized by heightened corporate social responsibility, ethical conduct transcends just individual transactions. Sales firms possess the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the wider community by engaging in ethical activities, philanthropic endeavors, and adopting sustainable business strategies. Examining the correlation between ethical conduct and social responsibility goals can offer a comprehensive understanding of an organization's influence.

Although there is a body of literature on the topic of ethics in sales, there remains a knowledge vacuum on the perception, implementation, and promotion of ethical behavior inside sales companies. The present study aims to bridge this existing knowledge gap by conducting an extensive qualitative examination of the topic at hand. In summary, the justification for investigating the significance of ethical conduct within sales organizations is rooted in its diverse effects on individuals, companies, and society as a whole. This research seeks to contribute to the improvement of ethical standards and practices inside sales companies by examining the ethical difficulties, organizational culture, legal implications, and broader ramifications associated with ethical behavior in sales.

1.2 Purpose and Objective of the Study

The purpose of this research is to do a comprehensive qualitative investigation on the significance of ethical conduct inside sales companies. This research endeavors to accomplish the following objectives by conducting a comprehensive investigation of the experiences, views, and behaviors of sales professionals and organizational leaders:

- The main aim of this study is to ascertain and comprehend the ethical dilemmas that sales professionals confront in their routine tasks. This study aims to provide insight into the pragmatic and ethical challenges encountered by professionals in the sales industry.
- The primary objective of this Study is to investigate the impact of organizational culture on ethical conduct within sales firms. The objective of this study is to examine the influence of an organization's culture on the ethical behavior of its sales force. It seeks to offer valuable insights into the various aspects that either facilitate or impede ethical conduct within sales teams.
- The aim of this study is to assess the direct influence of ethical conduct on the reputation of a firm and its capacity to establish and sustain customer trust. The objective of this study is to get insights into the impact of ethical sales practices on brand reputation and customer loyalty.
- The primary objective of this project is to investigate the correlation between ethical conduct and adherence to legal and regulatory frameworks within the sales domain. In undertaking this endeavor, the aim is to ascertain the possible legal and regulatory ramifications that may arise from unethical behavior within sales companies.
- The primary aim of this research is to examine the impact of the ethical atmosphere within a sales firm on the well-being and motivation of its employees. The objective of this study is to examine the correlation between ethical conduct and the levels of employee happiness and engagement.
- The primary objective of this study is to examine the extent to which ethical conduct in sales activities is consistent with the ideals of corporate social responsibility. The objective of this study is to investigate the impact of ethical sales practices on wider social and environmental goals.
- The primary aim of this study is to enhance the current knowledge base by filling in the gaps in the understanding of ethical conduct within sales companies. The primary objective of this study is to conduct an extensive qualitative examination of the subject matter, with the aim of addressing and filling existing gaps in the current body of research.

In essence, the objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis on the significance of ethical conduct inside sales firms. This study delves into the ethical dilemmas, organizational factors, legal ramifications, and wider implications associated with ethical behavior in this context. This research endeavors to attain these objectives in order to offer significant insights that can inform ethical behaviors and legislation within the sales sector, so contributing to the wider discourse on business ethics.

1.3 Research Questions

- Sales professionals encounter several ethical issues in their everyday activities. These challenges have a significant impact on their decision-making processes and subsequent actions.
- This inquiry examines the impact of organizational culture on the ethical conduct of sales professionals inside sales organizations, with a particular focus on the function of leadership in fostering or impeding ethical behavior.
- What are the perceived ramifications of ethical or unethical conduct in sales, specifically with regards to reputation, customer trust, adherence to legal regulations, and the welfare and motivation of sales professionals?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

Ethical conduct in sales organizations involves maintaining moral ideals, integrity, and honesty in interactions with clients, colleagues, and groups with vested interests. Sales professionals often face ethical dilemmas, such as providing accurate product information or addressing potential hazards. The ethical conduct of a sales team is influenced by cultural dynamics, with societies that value ethical behavior more likely to promote honesty and transparency (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). Ethical conduct can lead to trust, reputation, and customer loyalty, while unethical conduct can result in negative consequences. A work environment that supports ethical standards positively influences employee motivation and engagement. Ethical conduct extends beyond individual transactions to corporate social responsibility,

integrating ethical standards, humanitarian efforts, and sustainable business strategies (Trevino and Nelson, 2016). This understanding of ethical conduct in sales is crucial for making informed decisions and contributing to social and environmental objectives.

2.1.1 Ethical Behavior in Sales Organizations

Organizational culture significantly impacts ethical conduct in sales companies. Leadership plays a crucial role in cultivating a corporate environment that fosters ethical conduct, particularly within sales companies. Effective leaders communicate the significance of ethical principles and demonstrate them through their own behavior. Employees in firms with ethical leadership are more likely to report instances of ethical behavior and feel secure reporting wrongdoing (Ferrel and Gresham, 1985). Establishing corporate values and explicit endorsement of ethical principles by senior management also contribute to the development of an ethical culture. Ethical training is essential for establishing an ethical culture within sales companies (Ford and Richardson, 1994). Effective training provides individuals with the necessary information and competencies to identify and resolve ethical dilemmas, enhancing their ability to make informed judgments in line with company standards.

2.1.2 Ethical Challenges in Sales

Sales personnel face numerous ethical dilemmas in the competitive sales industry, including pricing strategies, product depiction, and customer relationship management. Pricing discrimination, which involves offering varying rates to different customers, can be seen as inequitable and morally questionable. This can lead to customer dissatisfaction and undermine trust. Sales professionals also face ethical challenges when presenting products or services, as exaggerating features or omitting potential downsides can undermine ethical norms (Hosmer, 1994). Performance goals can also encourage manipulation, deception, or excessive promotion, which can undermine customer trust and lead to financial consequences. Addressing these ethical issues requires careful assessment of sales professionals, ethical training, and corporate policies. Addressing these ethical dilemmas is crucial for maintaining customer confidence and ensuring sustained prosperity.

2.2 Theoretical Review

Ethical conduct in sales companies is influenced by various theories. Deontological ethics, a philosophical framework by Immanuel Kant, emphasizes the moral obligation to uphold certain principles, such as honesty and integrity, regardless of financial benefits. Utilitarianism, a moral theory by John Stuart Mill, focuses on maximizing aggregate happiness while minimizing damage. Virtue ethics, a philosophy by Aristotle, encourages sales professionals to cultivate virtues like honesty, fairness, and empathy. Social Contract Theory, a social contract theory, posits that ethical conduct arises from implicit or explicit agreements within a society or organization (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Cognitive Moral Development, based on Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development, suggests that sales professionals exhibit varying degrees of moral development. These theories provide a foundation for understanding ethical dilemmas in sales and offer guidance for analyzing specific situations and decision-making procedures.

2.3 The Impact of Ethical Behavior on Reputation and Customer Trust

Sales organizations' ethical conduct significantly impacts their reputation and trust with consumers. A strong ethical framework, including transparency, honesty, and integrity, is crucial for maintaining a positive reputation. Research shows that 70% of a company's reputation is influenced by its governance, citizenship, and workplace practices. Trust is essential for fostering customer loyalty, as it is a fundamental building block for enduring relationships. Studies show that 81% of customers trust companies with ethical conduct (Laczniak and Murphy, 1993). High-priority ethical behavior leads to increased client retention and advocacy, with a positive correlation between trust and repeat purchases. Organizations with robust ethical standing also show superior performance in the long run. Thus, ethical conduct in the sales sector is crucial for maintaining a favorable brand image and fostering enduring customer connections, leading to continued profitability and success.

2.4 The Impact of Ethical Behavior on Reputation and Customer Trust

Ethical conduct in sales organizations significantly impacts their reputation and trust with customers. Trust is a key factor in establishing and nurturing customer loyalty, as it is a fundamental building block for successful interactions. Sales businesses that consistently adhere to ethical principles tend to cultivate favorable reputations in the marketplace. Trust is also linked to long-term client loyalty, with a positive correlation between customer trust in a firm and their propensity to engage in repeat purchases and recommend the brand. Research shows that organizations with robust ethical reputations tend to surpass their counterparts in terms of long-term performance (Lewicki et al., 1998). Thus,

ethical conduct in the sales sector is crucial for maintaining a favorable brand image, cultivating enduring customer connections, and achieving sustained profitability and achievement.

2.5 Legal and Regulatory Implications of Ethical Behavior

The ethical conduct exhibited by sales organizations carries substantial legal and regulatory consequences that surpass basic moral deliberations. Unethical sales techniques have the potential to result in legal ramifications, such as monetary penalties, litigation, and impairment of an organization's operational integrity.

2.5.1 Consequences of Unethical Sales Practices:

Unethical sales activities, such as deceptive advertising and fraudulent tactics, often violate consumer protection laws and can lead to legal lawsuits. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is a key entity that has taken legal action against businesses involved in misleading advertising. The potential fines and legal penalties can significantly impact an organization's financial performance and long-term viability. Adherence to industry norms and regulatory requirements is crucial for sales organizations, as noncompliance can result in legal proceedings, monetary sanctions, and enduring harm to an organization's standing (Murphy and Laczniak, 1981). Regulatory bodies and industry associations closely monitor sales organizations to ensure compliance with ethical and legal norms. Thus, ethical conduct within the sales sector is not just a moral obligation but also a legal mandate.

2.6 Ethical Behavior and Employee Well-being

The ramifications of ethical conduct within sales firms extend beyond client relations and legal adherence, exerting a substantial influence on staff welfare, job contentment, and general morale. The establishment of a positive ethical atmosphere inside the workplace engenders a conducive environment for employees, hence cultivating motivation and enhancing overall well-being (Murphy and Laczniak, 1981). The presence of an ethical work environment is conducive to the cultivation of elevated levels of employee morale and job satisfaction. When employees hold the perception that their firm places importance on and actively encourages ethical conduct, it is more probable that they had a heightened sense of engagement and motivation. The correlation between employee happiness and ethical conduct, encompassing honest communication, equitable treatment, and adherence to moral values, is evident. The Journal of Business Ethics released a study that revealed a significant favorable association between the perception of ethical leadership and employee job satisfaction.

The influence of ethical climate, which refers to the dominant ethics and moral principles inside a business, on employee motivation is significant. The findings of a study conducted by the Institute of Business Ethics indicate that employees working in firms characterized by a robust ethical culture exhibit higher levels of motivation. Individuals are inclined to establish congruence between their personal values and the principles upheld by the business, resulting in a heightened sense of purpose and dedication to their respective responsibilities (Murphy and Laczniak, 1981). The ethical climate serves to support the belief that employees are making a meaningful contribution by being employed inside a company that upholds ethical principles.

2.6.1 The Impact on General Well-being:

The influence of an ethical work environment on the well-being of employees encompasses their holistic mental and emotional well-being. The cultivation of ethical conduct inside an organization has been shown to mitigate workplace stress, foster positive interpersonal connections, and engender a heightened sense of security among employees (Schwartz, 2001). Consequently, this leads to enhanced holistic welfare, encompassing both within and beyond the confines of the professional environment.

In summary, the adherence to ethical conduct inside sales firms holds not just moral value but also exerts a significant influence on employee morale, job satisfaction, and general well-being. The practice of ethical behavior within a professional setting has been found to have a significant impact on the overall work environment, employee motivation, and the reduction of workplace stress (Schwartz, 2001). Consequently, this leads to an enhanced quality of life for individuals inside the organization. The available empirical evidence substantiates the notion that fostering ethical conduct within the sales sector not only yields advantages for the firm, but also contributes to the overall well-being of its employees (Murphy and Laczniak, 1981). This underscores the significance of ethical conduct as a mutually beneficial proposition for both firms and their employees.

2.7 Ethical Behavior and Corporate Social Responsibility

The correlation between ethical conduct in sales companies and corporate social responsibility (CSR) is significant, since it underscores the wider societal implications of commercial operations. Sales firms possess the potential to make a positive societal impact by engaging in ethical and socially responsible practices (Schwartz, 2001). The establishment of this alignment cultivates a collective sense of objective, resulting in advantageous outcomes for both the company and society as a whole.

The broader societal impact of ethical behavior in sales encompasses more than just individual transactions, since it also pertains to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) entails an organization's dedication to conducting business in a manner that yields societal benefits, mitigates adverse environmental effects, and actively contributes to the welfare of its community (Brown and Dacin, 1997). The alignment of ethical conduct in sales with broader social and environmental objectives is evident.

There are numerous instances of sales firms actively participating in corporate social responsibility (CSR) endeavors. Several companies have implemented sustainable and environmentally conscious sales techniques, thereby diminishing their carbon emissions and making a positive contribution to environmental conservation (Brown and Dacin, 1997). Several individuals and organizations have implemented philanthropic initiatives, wherein they allocate a portion of their generated sales money towards charitable endeavors or provide help to local communities. Sales organizations exhibit their dedication to ethical conduct and their role in promoting overall society welfare by adopting these practices.

2.7.1 Ethical Behavior and Competitive Advantage

Ethical conduct in sales companies is not just a moral obligation but also a strategic resource that can enhance an organization's competitive edge. It influences customer attraction and retention, as customers prefer honesty and openness. Ethical behavior, demonstrated through truthful advertising and ethical sales techniques, fosters trust and appeals to customers who value equitable relationships (Palmatier et al., 2007). Ethical branding and reputation can help organizations gain a competitive edge by fostering a strong brand image, attracting a loyal client base, and improving market positioning. Ethical behavior also impacts employee recruitment and retention, as a work environment that upholds ethical principles promotes employee happiness and loyalty (Brown and Dacin, 1997). Recognizing the strategic significance of ethical conduct can help sales firms gain a competitive advantage.

2.8 Gaps in Existing Research

The research on ethical conduct within sales companies is limited due to its focus on quantitative methodologies and lack of qualitative studies. This research focuses on discrete aspects like customer trust and adherence to legal regulations, neglecting the comprehensive effects on sales organizations. Contemporary ethical issues, such as digital sales platforms and artificial intelligence, are also not adequately addressed. Comparative studies are lacking, limiting the understanding of ethical behavior across different contexts. This study aims to address these gaps and provide new perspectives on ethical conduct in sales companies, enhancing an understanding of its complexities.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The present study adopts a qualitative research methodology to examine the significance of ethical conduct within sales companies. The selection of qualitative research is based on its suitability for investigating intricate and context-dependent phenomena, such as the ethical dilemmas encountered in the sales sector. This methodology facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the topic, encompassing the intricate viewpoints and firsthand encounters of those working in sales.

3.2 Data Collection Method

The collection of data was conducted by means of semi-structured interviews involving a heterogeneous group of participants, encompassing sales professionals, sales managers, and other relevant stakeholders from a range of sales firms. This approach demonstrates a high level of efficacy in acquiring primary testimonies, perspectives, and understandings pertaining to moral conduct, ethical obstacles, and their ramifications within the realm of sales. 3.4 Sampling technique and Sample size

3.3 Sampling technique and ample Size

Purposive sampling is used to select participants with extensive sales experience and diverse perspectives on ethical behavior. A 15-person sample size is chosen for its richness and diversity, allowing for thorough exploration of ethical concerns, corporate culture, and sales ethics. This sample size ensures data saturation and a thorough examination of sales companies' ethical behavior. The 15-person sample size ensures that participants' insights address study questions and goals, making research efficient and allowing for a comprehensive examination of ethical practices within the sales industry.

3.4 Data analysis technique

The study used thematic analysis to analyze 15 participants' data, revealing the complexity of ethical behavior in sales companies. Thematic analysis involves familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and defining themes, validating themes through peer debriefing, and writing a research report. To ensure rigor and dependability, the team maintained an audit trail, share findings with participants, and employ multiple researchers to reduce bias. Thematic analysis helps uncover and organize qualitative data patterns, clarifying research questions and complexities of sales ethics.

3.5 Sources of Data

This study uses in-depth interviews and focus groups to gather data on ethical conduct in sales firms. In-depth interviews involve open-ended questions to gather personal experiences and viewpoints on ethical conduct. Document analysis is used to enhance the insights obtained from interviews. Demographic data, including age, gender, professional background, and organization type, is collected to establish a comprehensive profile of participants. Scenarios illustrating ethical conduct are used to expose participants to ethical behavior situations relevant to the sales setting. These data sources provided a comprehensive understanding of the significance of ethical conduct within sales firms, ensuring informed consent from all participants.

4 Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

4.1 Preparation of Raw Data

The qualitative study followed a systematic process to ensure the integrity and preparedness of the raw data for analysis. Transcripts were generated using a professional transcription provider, and member checking was conducted with participants to verify their statements. Data organization was done by categorizing data according to each participant, using a pseudonym system to protect privacy and anonymity. The raw data was imported into the MAXQDA software for analysis, which enhanced data management and coding. A data folder was created within the Learning and Data Portal (LDP) to facilitate Level 5 Peer Review and ensure data confidentiality. The study's methodology ensured the data's integrity, participant confidentiality, and adherence to the Institutional Review Board's informed consent protocol.

4.2 Descriptive Data

The dataset generated through the data gathering procedures for this qualitative investigation comprises a total of 15 participants. Every individual included in the study contributed significant perspectives on the ethical conduct observed within sales companies. The tables provided in this section give a comprehensive overview of the descriptive data for each participant, together with details regarding the data collection procedures employed in the study.

Table 1 Individual Participant Data

| Participants | Setting | Interview Date | Duration | Number of Transcript Pages |
|---------------|-----------|----------------|------------|----------------------------|
| Participant 1 | Zoom | 02/09/2023 | 70 minutes | 8 |
| Participant 2 | Zoom | 29/08/2023 | 63 minutes | 7 |
| Participant 3 | Zoom | 4/09/2023 | 50 minutes | 5 |
| Participant 4 | In-person | 01/09/2023 | 48 minutes | 4 |
| Participant 5 | Zoom | 06/09/2023 | 62 minutes | 8 |

| | | | | |
|----------------|-----------|------------|------------|---|
| Participant 6 | Zoom | 03/09/2023 | 50 minutes | 5 |
| Participant 7 | In-person | 05/09/2023 | 52 minutes | 6 |
| Participant 8 | Zoom | 06/09/2023 | 35 minutes | 4 |
| Participant 9 | Zoom | 08/09/2023 | 64 minutes | 7 |
| Participant 10 | In-person | 05/09/2023 | 53 minutes | 6 |
| Participant 11 | Zoom | 06/09/2023 | 39 minutes | 4 |
| Participant 12 | Zoom | 04/09/2023 | 42 minutes | 4 |
| Participant 13 | Zoom | 05/09/2023 | 58 minutes | 7 |
| Participant 14 | Zoom | 06/09/2023 | 65 minutes | 8 |
| Participant 15 | Zoom | 08/09/2023 | 50 minutes | 5 |
| MEAN | | | | |
| TOTAL | | | | |

Table 2 Focus Group Data

| Participants | Group | Contributions | Participation Length | Initial Codes Produced |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Participant 1 | Group 1 | 02/09/2023 | 70 minutes | 4 |
| Participant 2 | Group 1 | 29/08/2023 | 63 minutes | 5 |
| Participant 3 | Group 1 | 4/09/2023 | 50 minutes | 4 |
| Participant 4 | Group 1 | 01/09/2023 | 48 minutes | 4 |
| Participant 5 | Group 2 | 06/09/2023 | 62 minutes | 5 |
| Participant 6 | Group 1 | 03/09/2023 | 50 minutes | 3 |
| Participant 7 | Group 2 | 05/09/2023 | 52 minutes | 7 |
| Participant 8 | Group 2 | 06/09/2023 | 35 minutes | 6 |
| Participant 9 | Group 2 | 08/09/2023 | 64 minutes | 5 |
| Participant 10 | Group 2 | 05/09/2023 | 53 minutes | 4 |
| Participant 11 | Group 2 | 06/09/2023 | 39 minutes | 1 |
| Participant 12 | Group 1 | 04/09/2023 | 42 minutes | 3 |
| Participant 13 | Group 2 | 05/09/2023 | 58 minutes | 1 |
| Participant 14 | Group 2 | 06/09/2023 | 65 minutes | 2 |
| Participant 15 | Group 2 | 08/09/2023 | 50 minutes | 2 |
| MEAN | N/A | N/A | | |
| TOTAL | | | | |

The time of the focus groups and interviews, as well as the amount of transcript pages, are all summarized in these tables. To protect participant confidentiality, specific demographic information is withheld from this section; however, it is kept in a separate appendix and follows informed consent guidelines.

4.3 Thematic Analysis Procedure

The study team conducted a thorough analysis of gathered data, including interview transcripts and document analysis, to gain insights into the ethical landscape in sales businesses. They began by coding the data into manageable chunks, focusing on moral behavior segments. The team then developed themes based on trends, connections, and resemblances, aiming to capture common experiences and viewpoints. These themes were then critically evaluated and improved, ensuring they were true, relevant, and in line with the study's goals. The themes were then interpreted within the larger literature on ethics in sales organizations, highlighting their relevance and ramifications. This process ensured a thorough investigation of the study data, providing valuable information about the significance of moral behavior in sales companies.

5 Conclusion

The study provides a thorough summary of the thematic analysis and the comparison with related literature. In-depth examination of the complex landscape of ethical behavior within sales organizations is the focus of the research, which recognizes it as a varied, dynamic phenomena influenced by a number of important aspects. The themes that emerged from the thematic analysis highlight the significance of ethical conundrums, organizational culture, client trust, compliance with regulatory requirements, and the well-being and motivation of sales professionals in influencing ethical behavior within the sales industry.

The results are credible since they are consistent with earlier studies in the field, which adds to the strength of findings. The research has shown that ethical behavior in sales goes beyond single instances and is an essential aspect of sales practitioners' professional lives. Understanding the pervasiveness of ethical behavior within sales organizations improves comprehension of the difficulties and opportunities that lie ahead. These observations add to the larger discussion of sales ethics and provide a foundation for future study and sales-related strategic decision-making.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No disclosure of conflict of interest.

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