Moving beyond ethical decision-making: A practice-based view to study unethical sales behavior

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Moving beyond ethical decision-making: A practice-based view to study unethical sales behavior

Abstract:
Changes in the business environment are rapidly transforming sales practice and pressuring the integrity of key actors in sales. Given that unethical sales behavior is a social activity produced and reproduced by various actors in a complex sales task environment, we introduce a novel research perspective to the study of unethical sales behavior, namely a practice-based view. With knowledge from a systematic literature review and a practice-based view from organization research, we suggest unethical behavior should be studied as a practice formed through socialization and interaction with relevant others. This view provides an important alternative as well as a complementary perspective to the ethical decision-making paradigm that has dominated the field for several decades. The study answers scholars’ recent calls to strengthen the theoretical foundation of sales ethics research and further extend its perspective towards the social context of sales. With a focus on dynamics, social relations, and the enactment of practices, the practice-based view produces new types of knowledge on unethical behavior, and potential new means for addressing it. The paper makes suggestions for future practice-based research and proposes several theories for use in studying unethical behavior in currently important sales contexts.

Keywords
Sales ethics; practice lens; practice-based view; unethical sales behavior; ethical decision-making; literature review
Over the past decades, the paradigm of ethical decision-making (EDM) has dominated sales ethics research (Ingram, LaForge, and Schwepker 2007). Unethical behavior has been approached as individual decision-making emphasizing the role of salespersons as decision-makers and employer organizations as controllers of sales behavior (McClaren 2000, 2013). Based on influencing factors related to salespersons and their organizations, sales scholars have developed EDM models to better explain and predict unethical sales behavior (see, e.g., Ferrell, Johnston, and Ferrell 2007; McClaren 2000; Wotruba 1990).

Recently, sales ethics research has come under criticism for providing an overly simplistic view of unethical behavior. Due to their boundary-spanning role, salespersons are affected by other actors not only in their own organization but also outside of it in the wider sales task environment (Ferrell, Johnston, and Ferrell 2007; Seevers, Skinner, and Kelley 2007). Accordingly, scholars have suggested extending the study of unethical sales behaviors to broader social contexts, such as the sales profession, industry or trade union, and emphasized the need to draw on alternative theoretical perspectives to create an understanding of salespersons’ behavior in these contexts (Bush et al. 2017; Ferrell, Johnston, and Ferrell 2007; McClaren 2015; McClaren, Adam, and Vocino 2010; Williams and Plouffe 2007).

It has become clear that salespersons are now working in increasingly complex social settings, where they are expected to deal with various company-external actors (Hartmann, Wieland, and Vargo 2018; Plouffe et al. 2016). Such environments expose them to conflicting interests and pressures that eventually lead to misconduct (Bush et al. 2017; Dixon and Tanner 2012; Schmitz and Ganesan 2014). The increasing demand for value-creating services and solutions, the globalization of markets and the use of social media and various sales-assisting
technologies, have dramatically changed the sales environment and imposed pressure to create and adopt new sales practices (Andzulis, Panagopoulos, and Rapp 2012; Bush et al. 2007; Marshall et al. 2012; Panagopoulos et al. 2011; Sheth and Sharma 2008). As Dixon and Tanner (2012, 12) point out, the nature of sales work is in flux and salespersons increasingly vulnerable to the manifold interactions within the broader social context that cannot be controlled with the old management frames. New theoretical perspectives are urgently needed to make sense of unethical sales behavior in the changed environment.

In this article, we answer the call by proposing a practice-based view for the study of unethical sales behavior. We base our view on organization research (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011; Nicolini and Monteiro 2017), also drawing on its origins in social sciences (Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 2002). The practice-based view has been adopted in two recent studies on sales. Geiger and Kelly (2014) proposed it as a mean to conceptualize the current socio-material transformations of sales work, and den Nieuwenboer, Cunha and Treviño (2017) applied it to uncover how deceptive sales performance was socially produced within an organization. We build on both works while introducing the practice-based view as a theoretical lens for the study of unethical sales behavior.

The practice-based view is particularly well-suited to the study of unethical sales behavior in the changed social conditions. For instance, Seever, Skinner and Kelley (2007, 343) define unethical sales behavior as a social activity, or practice, that is remarkably affected by interaction with other actors in a sales environment, and that typically has harmful effects on others or at least violates some norms that are agreed upon in a social collective. The practice-based view represents an alternative to the dominant EDM perspective, examining unethical sales behavior as a socially and contextually situated activity. While the focus of EDM lies on how individuals make decisions
related to their subsequent sales behavior, the practice-based view concentrates on the behavior itself, zooming in on routine activities that socially construct and maintain practices, and are also capable of changing them. The practice-based view thus provides a distinct research approach to unethical sales behavior that manifests itself at the level of empirical reality. We argue that this practice lens offers a novel way of studying unethical sales behavior and new means of influencing potential misconduct.

The study proceeds in three phases. First, we conduct a systematic literature review to create an understanding of how unethical sales behavior has been addressed in past sales ethics research. Based on an inductive analysis of the literature, we provide an overview of the key actors, and their unethical behaviors and activities, along with the theoretical approaches used to study these behaviors. In the second phase, we introduce a practice-based view for sales ethics research, where the social context of sales is described as a constellation of actors who interact with each other and thereby affect the formation, maintenance, and change of unethical sales practices. Finally, we suggest how the practice-based view can be applied in future sales ethics research, using three marketing and organization theories as conceptual tools, and three currently important sales contexts as examples of application domains.

**Research design**

The literature review followed the step-by-step procedure for conducting systematic reviews described by Booth, Papaioannou, and Sutton (2012): define the scope, search the literature, assess the evidence base, and analyze the findings.
Defining the scope

In selecting the sources of relevant literature, we decided to search articles only from peer-reviewed journals. Following the reasoning of Vaaland, Heide, and Grønhaug (2008), we did not include textbooks or conference proceedings, since research published in scholarly business journals provides the most up-to-date and reliable overview of scientific research results. Because the Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management (JPSSM) is the only scholarly journal dedicated to sales research, and articles on sales ethics frequently appear in general-audience business journals, we conducted a broad search of all business journals using the EBSCO Business Source, ProQuest, and Science Direct as databases. Together, they offer extensive coverage of scholarly work on business as well as have been considered reliable sources by other researchers (e.g. McClaren 2013). We searched all articles published up to 2017, which was the year we finalized the review.

Searching the literature

We used the following keywords in conducting our search: sales ethics, ethical sales, and ethical selling. We also used different combinations of the words: sales AND ethics; sales AND ethical; ethical AND selling; and, selling AND ethics. We deliberately chose general keywords related to sales ethics, in order to identify the maximum number of articles and miss the minimum number of relevant studies (see Tari 2011). We searched for relevant terms in the title, abstract, and author-supplied keywords of the articles, and found Boolean logic very helpful in locating relevant articles (Booth, Papaioannou, and Sutton 2012). The search produced 1611 results.
Assessing the evidence

We first removed duplicates from the 1611 results, leaving 291 articles, and then read the title and abstract of each of those articles to ensure its relevance to our research. If the relevance was unclear, we further read the introduction and even the full article to confirm it at least partially dealt with some unethical behaviors related to any actor embedded in the sales environment. Several articles were considered irrelevant, as their focus lay on a business or non-business area other than sales, such as advertising, accounting, law, or public relations (e.g. Brennan and Baines 2006; Kim 2014). This screening process yielded 146 articles clearly related to our research topic: the unethical behaviors and practices of key actors in a sales environment.

Realizing the potential limitations of the keyword search, we followed research advice to employ a secondary search criterion (see Tari 2011), in this case looking at the reference lists. The review articles by McClaren (2000, 2013) on salesperson EDM proved very useful for that purpose. Overall, the secondary search yielded an additional 18 articles. In sum, adopting primary and secondary search criteria (146+18), we selected 164 scholarly articles for further examination.

Analyzing the findings

The final step was to analyze relevant knowledge from the chosen articles to reveal an overall picture of how the field of sales ethics has studied and understood unethical sales behavior. We employed content analysis (Vaaland, Heide, and Grønhaug 2008) at this stage, focusing on the manifest content of the studies and describing the content quantitatively whenever possible. The analysis was nevertheless conducted with an explorative mindset, through an inductive and iterative process without a priori framework. The analytical questions were specified, and new questions posed during the process.
One researcher systematically categorized each study following the approach used by Bush and Grant (1994), and Williams and Plouffe (2007). The categorization was primarily based on publication characteristics, how each study described the unethical behaviors of the key actors in a sales environment, as well as the theoretical foundations of each study. To provide a basic quantitative overview of the research, the analyst first extracted data on each article related to the article type (conceptual/empirical), publication outlet and time, methodological approach, and geographical origin of the data. Second, the analyst scrutinized the unethical behaviors and actors involved therein. At this stage, three key questions were posed to guide the analysis: What unethical behaviors are being studied? Whose behavior is in question? Towards whom is unethical behavior directed? Third, the analyst focused on the theories applied in each study to describe and explain unethical sales behavior. Normative and positive ethics are widely known as dominant theoretical approaches in marketing and sales ethics research (McClaren 2000; Nill and Schibrowsky 2007). Given the call to extend the theoretical foundation of sales ethics studies, the analysis placed specific emphasis on other potential theories employed.

Review findings

Overview of published research

The reviewed articles were published in 48 scientific business journals from various sub-disciplines of business (see Table 1).

Table 1. Journals and articles published on the topic

The majority of the contributions were published in marketing journals (57%), led by JPSSM, and in journals dedicated to business ethics (24%), led by Journal of Business Ethics. The
review also showed that research interest in unethical sales behavior has increased considerably over the years (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1 near here**

**Figure 1. Number of published articles over time**

To create a deeper understanding of the nature of the relevant sales ethics research, it was illustrative to examine the methodological approaches and origins of the research data. The review revealed that of 164 selected articles, 148 (90.2%) studies were empirical and 16 (9.8%) conceptual, including two reviews by McClaren (2000, 2013). In terms of the research methodology, 137 (92.5%) of the empirical studies employed a quantitative approach, mostly through surveys and experiments with closed-ended questions and scenarios or vignette-based questionnaires. Of the remaining eleven (7.5%) studies, only five were qualitative (see e.g. Bush et al. 2007; Millington, Eberhardt, and Wilkinson 2005), while six used a mixed methods design (see, e.g., Bush et al. 2017; Carter 2000; Román 2003). This indicated the understanding of unethical behavior was in the first place deductively inferred, and knowledge of the key actors and nature of their unethical behavior only occasionally based on inductive reasoning and context-specific data.

The geographical origin of the data used in the studies indicated a strong inclination towards samples from the United States (61%). Most of the empirical studies used single-country data, and only six (4%) employed multi-country samples (see e.g. Weeks et al. 2006; Lee et al. 2009; Cooper and Nakabayashi 2010). Data samples from Europe accounted for 13% of the cases, 9% were of Asian origin, and 13% did not report the origin of their data sample.
Overview of unethical behavior of key actors

The findings of our literature review demonstrate that research on sales ethics has identified various unethical behaviors and activities. This existing literature further identifies salespersons, managers of a firm, and co-workers, as key actors within the organization, and customers and competitors as relevant outsiders. Researchers have treated these actors either as agents or targets of unethical activities, examining the unethical issues from one actor’s perspective at a time and keeping the sales force at the center of attention. The studies could be conveniently divided into two main categories: those that examined salesperson-driven unethical behavior directed towards other actors, and those that examined other actor-driven unethical behavior towards sales staff.

Table 2 provides an overview of studied unethical sales behavior.

Table 2: Overview of unethical behavior of key actors in sales

Table 2 near here

Salesperson-driven unethical behavior towards other key actors

The reviewed studies mainly discussed salespersons’ unethical behavior with respect to their own organization or its management, and customers. These two groups are the key players in the sales environment, with whom sales staff mostly interact. In the context of their own company, several unethical activities of salespersons were discussed ranging from violating the code of ethics to resigning at short notice (see, e.g., Carson 2001; Deconinck 2005; Donoho and Heinze 2011; Inks, Avila, and Chapman 2004; Inks and Loe 2005; Lee et al. 2009). Even if studies highlighted the importance of the code of ethics and policies, they also showed that a formal policy cannot function as a guarantee of ethical behavior (Lagace, Dahlstrom, and Gassenheimer 1991). Arkingstall’s (1994) study showed that 75% of salespersons knowingly violate company’s codes. Codes and
policies can change the salesforce’s ethical perceptions but are unlikely to change their behavior (Valentine and Barnett 2002).

With respect to salespersons’ unethical behavior towards customers, offering bribes and gifts (Millington, Eberhardt, and Wilkinson 2005; Zhuang, Herndon, and Tsang 2012), and exaggerating or overpromising (Dubinsky et al. 1992; Marchetti 1997), were widely identified as unethical activities. A few studies also concerned some uncommon sales behaviors, such as leaking or misusing customers’ confidential information (Cooper and Nakabayashi 2010; Dabholkar and Kellaris 1992).

Compared to the number of studies that concerned the unethical behavior of salespersons towards customers, relatively few studies concerned their unethical behavior towards co-workers or competitors. With regard to co-workers, taking credit for colleagues’ work is considered a highly unethical practice, especially if management is not taking any serious action against sales staff who do so (Lee et al. 2009; Mantel 2005). Sales personnel are also responsible for blaming colleagues for their own unethical behaviors (Lagace, Dahlstrom, and Gassenheimer 1991). With respect to competitors, salespersons have been criticized for using unethical and improper methods of gathering information about them, and even for using illegal means of spying to obtain competitors’ information (Cooper and Nakabayashi 2010). Instances of spreading false and misleading comments about competitors or their products, staff, or agents are common examples of defamation (Cooper and Nakabayashi 2010; Pettijohn, Keith, and Burnett 2011).

**Other actor-driven unethical behavior towards salespersons**

The reviewed articles also pointed out that other key actors, such as an organization’s managers, co-workers, customers, and competitors, may act unethically towards salespersons (see Table 2). The most widely discussed unethical management practices were related to the unethical use of
rewards, incentives or punishment (Bellizzi and Hite 1989; Román and Munuera 2005). Studies have also shown that the ethical behavior of top management influences the behavior of lower-level staff (Deconinck 2005). Moreover, studies show that management’s discrimination is positively related to salespersons’ unethical behavior (Schwepker and Good 2004; Valentine, Hanson, and Fleischman 2017), and those who are experiencing sales pressure are more likely to behave in an unethical way (Robertson and Anderson 1993; Schwepker and Good 2007).

Contrary to our expectations, only a few studies addressed the unethical activities of customers, co-workers, and competitors directed towards salespersons. Some studies examined customer-driven behavior, such as asking for and expecting gifts, favors, or bribes (Forker and Janson 1990; Zhuang, Herndon, and Tsang 2012); sexual harassment (Fine, Shepherd, and Josephs 1994, 1999; Swift and Kent 1994); discrimination; and, facilitation of backdoor selling (Inks, Avila, and Chapman 2004). The unethical behaviors of competitors and co-workers, which are the same as those identified earlier for sales staff, include competitors stealing the leads of another company’s salesforce (Carter 2000; Pettijohn, Keith, and Burnett 2011) or co-workers taking credit for their colleagues’ work or shifting blame (Lagace, Dahlstrom, and Gassenheimer 1991; Lee et al. 2009; Mantel 2005).

Overall, the literature review demonstrated that studies on sales ethics identify a wide range of unethical sales behaviors by several types of sales-relevant actor. Research centered, however, on salesperson behavior, explaining it by one or a few variables. The overall picture of research is scattered. With a few exceptions, most of the empirical studies considered several unethical activity types at a time, and examined them from one actor’s perspective only, separately from the other influential actors in the social setting. To provide a more profound understanding of how
unethical behavior has been conceived and studied within its social context, we conducted an analysis of the theoretical perspectives used in the extant research.

**Theoretical foundations of the sales ethics literature**

The analysis of the theoretical foundations of the studies suggested that the sales ethics research field is dominated by a single paradigm, namely EDM. This perspective has been used in rich empirical investigations to predict and control the unethical behavior of the individual salesperson (McClaren 2000; 2013). The findings showed that of 164 studies, 138 (84%) directly focused on the EDM approach and drew on normative and positive ethics, whereas only 26 (16%) of studies used alternative theories to study unethical behavior in sales.

We found that early researchers (up to year 2000) mostly measured unethical sales behaviors in terms of right or wrong, using normative moral frameworks and building the theoretical foundation of their studies on moral reasoning (Kohlberg 1969; Rest 1986), utility theory (Etzioni 1988), moral relativism (Reidenbach, Robin, and Dawson 1991), and ethical theories (Beauchamp and Bowie 1979; Frankena 1973). Later, the normative marketing frameworks proposed by Laczniak (1993) and Laczniak and Murphy (2006) became the basis for studies in sales ethics. Interest in normative ethics has gradually declined but is still used in many studies (see e.g. Mullen, Cory, and Martinez 2016; Sulsky, Marcus, and MacDonald 2016). Some studies also focused on the impact of social context on sales-based ethical reasoning (see e.g. Valentine and Bateman 2011).

Besides the normative guidelines, sales researchers increasingly focused on understanding the EDM process known as positive ethics. The review showed that studies investigated various factors that explain the EDM process, including individual factors (e.g. gender, age, experience, moral values) and management-related organizational factors (e.g. supervision, leadership,
rewards, codes, punishment, training). Other factors of interest were ethical intensity of the issue at hand (Jones 1991), and the different aspects of the sales organization’s ethical climate (Ferrell, Johnston, and Ferrell 2007; Hochstein, Zahn, and Bolander 2017; Schwepker 2013). The studies on positive ethics were mainly based on deontological and teleological ethics theories (Hunt and Vitell 1986, 1992; Jones 1991; Trevino 1986), contingency theory (Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Ferrell, Gresham and Fraedrich 1989), and attitude and behavior reasoning theories (Bommer et al. 1987; Dubinsky and Loken 1989). In sum, our review indicates that the EDM perspective, which draws on both normative and positive ethics, has dominated the field.

We were particularly interested in examining alternative theories and perspectives used in sales ethics research. Table 3 illustrates the theoretical foundation of the rest of the 26 studies.

Table 3. Alternative theories employed in the reviewed research

The theories can conveniently be categorized into four groups: relational, social, economic, other. A large group of studies has focused on the relational aspects of a salesperson-customer dyad, employing the relationship marketing theory. These studies mainly measured the impact of a salesperson’s ethical behavior on customer perceived trust, satisfaction and commitment (see, e.g., Hansen and Riggle 2009; Ou et al. 2012; Román and Salvador 2005).

We further found that the most recent work has introduced various social theories into the study of EDM. The studies have mainly measured the impact of social context, for instance socialization, social networks, collective group norms, and social learning, on salesperson decision-making. While the studies take in the social aspects of the sales context more broadly, the focus still lies on predicting EDM and the salesperson’s subsequent behavior (see Bush et al. 2017; McClaren, Adam, and Vocino 2010).
Some of the studies proposed an economic perspective on unethical sales behavior, by bringing agency theory and the theory of bounded rationality to the study of EDM. In addition, theories from other disciplines, for instance psychology (broad-and-build theory), and management (stakeholder theory), have been applied (see Table 3). The studies contribute to the understanding of salesperson behavior but add little to our knowledge of the broader social context of sales.

Despite efforts to introduce alternative theories into the research domain, it became clear that studies mainly rely on the EDM perspective, or aim to predict and control unethical sales behavior from another angle. The knowledge available from the existing research is focused on the individual salesperson and biased towards company-internal factors. The social context perspective has been expanded but is still limited to one-directional contextual effects on salesperson behavior. That means various important questions related to the current complexities of the broader social context of sales have not been addressed (cf. Hartmann, Wieland, and Vargo 2018; Plouffe et al. 2016; Schmitz and Ganesan 2014). For instance, studies examining interaction between various sales-relevant actors or dynamics related to unethical behavior are scarce.

The study of den Nieuwenboer, Cunha, and Treviño (2017) is an interesting exception. They conceive unethical sales behavior as a complex social practice emerging within an organization. In an ethnographic study based on organization theory on routine dynamics, the authors provide empirical evidence on how mid-level sales managers can use corrupt routines as tools to encourage their sales staff to construct deceptive performance and conceal it from top management. Zooming in on the social production of unethical practice provides a promising perspective to fill the aforementioned gaps in sales ethics research, and respond to the changes in
the sales environment. We thus introduce a practice-based view for the study of unethical sales behavior.

**A practice-based view to study unethical sales behavior**

The premise of the practice-based view is that social life is brought into being through recurrent everyday activities that form practices (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011). Drawing on Reckwitz’s (2002, p. 249) definition of practice, we define an unethical sales practice as “a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge”. In the practice-based view, individuals are seen as performers and carriers of practice, but it is the routinized activity that forms the basic unit of analysis (Nicolini and Monteiro 2017). Practices are also much more than an individual’s actions or sayings. They are bundles of human activity that enact social orders (Schatzki 2002), or as Nicolini and Monteiro (2017) put it, ‘regimes of activity’. When conceived as a practice, unethical sales behavior thus has both a collective and normative nature. Practices are performed in a certain social milieu, in which they are also learned and adopted, and where their acceptability is debated and decided (Nicolini and Monteiro 2017).

The practice-based view is particularly well-suited to the study of unethical sales behavior, as ethical considerations form an integral part of any social practice, and it is through social practices that individuals adopt shared values and norms in organizational and social realms (Erden, Scheider, and Krogh 2014; MacIntyre 1984; Schatzki 2002; 2005). With its focus on the dynamic constitution of social life, relations between agency and social orders (e.g. norms, institutions, structures), and the enactment of practices through human activity (Feldman and
Orlikowski 2011), the practice-based view provides a valuable new perspective for the study of unethical behavior in the social context of sales.

The practice-based view in comparison with ethical decision-making view

To illustrate the potential value of the practice-based view, we present it in comparison to the prevailing EDM perspective (see Figure 2). In order to highlight the differences between the two perspectives, the figure portrays a somewhat simplified picture of the research reality. For instance, the practice-based view is by no means a monolithic approach, but hosts a variety of different theories and viewpoints (Nicolini and Monteiro 2017).

Figure 2 near here

Figure 2: Comparison of ethical decision-making and practice-based views

The primary goal of the EDM view is to explain and predict salespersons’ decisions (McClaren 2000, 2013), while the practice-based view is inclined to describe and understand behavior in its social context. Instead of salespersons, the practice-based view emphasizes the activities of all relevant actors and the continuous reproduction of unethical practices in the sales environment. Both views thus address the same empirical phenomenon in business practice, that of unethical sales behavior, but with different scientific goals and foci. EDM scholars typically share a positivist world view combined with a quantitative research approach, as shown in our literature review, while practice researchers tend to adopt the principles of interpretative and qualitative research traditions. Studying a practice requires close contact with practitioners, and tracking the emergence of activities over time (Geiger and Kelly 2014; den Nieuwenboer, Cunha, and Treviño 2017). In the practice-based view, the social world may be conceived as external to salespersons or as socially constructed, but either way it is considered constituted from social practices (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011). Ultimately, the knowledge interests of the two research
perspectives are fundamentally different. EDM seeks the means to manage and control the individual salesperson, which serves the needs of a selling organization, while the practice-based view looks to change unethical behavior collectively, engaging different actors from the social context in this endeavor.

To summarize, the practice-based view offers a valuable option to study unethical behavior and its emergence in the social context of sales. In so doing, it complements the existing knowledge of sales ethics that has been dominated by the EDM view. In the practice-based view, unethical sales behavior is regarded as socially formed, maintained, and changed in interaction with relevant others (Feldman & Orlikowski 2011; Nicolini and Monteiro 2017). A salesperson is connected to other actors through a web of interdependent social relationships (Seevers, Skinner, and Kelley 2007), be it members of the sales community or profession (Bush et al. 2017; McClaren, Adam and Vocino 2010), or customers and competitors with potentially conflicting ethical interests (Robertson and Ross Jr 1995). By socializing with these actors and experiencing their unethical activities, salespersons develop their own patterns of behavior and participate in the social production of unethical practice. The practice-based view thus allows the study of unethical behavior within its given social constituencies, also beyond organizational boundaries.

**Type of new knowledge produced in practice-based sales ethics research**

The practice-based view invites sales ethics scholars to ask entirely new type of questions and thereby to extend current understanding of unethical behavior. Orlikowski (2010) separates out three viewpoints from which to study practices – empirical, theoretical, and philosophical (see also Feldman and Orlikowski 2011). While all three foci should be present in any practice-based study, researchers may emphasize one over the other(s) depending on the research objective. These viewpoints can be used in describing what kind of questions the practice-based view aims to
answer and consequently what kind of new knowledge it is able to produce for sales ethics research (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Type of new knowledge produced in practice-based sales ethics research**

The empirical viewpoint is a way to examine how individuals act. It acknowledges the centrality of human agency and recognizes the importance of routinized activities in an organization’s operations (Orlikowski 2010). In the sales context, we should simply ask: What are the activities of the key actors, e.g. sales staff, sales managers, competitors or customers, when they behave unethically? With good knowledge of their unethical activities, we can better understand established practices and subsequently influence unethical behavior. For example, if a sales manager knows about the unethical practices of a competitor’s salesforce, the extant wisdom of EDM related to rewards, disciplinary actions and training can be effectively applied to plan and direct management activities towards the company’s own sales staff. Over time, managers can change their management practices and become more effective in dealing with other actors’ misconduct.

The theoretical viewpoint (Orlikowski 2010) is particularly useful in creating an understanding of the relations between the unethical activities actors perform and the social orders (or structures) of organizational and social life such as norms, institutions, or social networks. Although the interest still lies in the unethical practice, the theoretical viewpoint is specifically concerned with explaining that practice. For example, the theoretical viewpoint asks why salespersons tend to ignore customers’ negative history? The answer to this question may lie in the linkages between various unethical activities of the other involved actors. Unrealistic sales targets set by management may force a salesperson to meet sales quotas at any cost, and if the
salesperson observes that their managers or co-workers are not concerned about customers’ earlier behavior, the salesperson may ultimately engage in ignoring the history. Configuring all these activities could reveal a pattern or a structure that produces the practice of ignoring customers’ negative history. Thus, the theoretical viewpoint explains how different actors participate in the social production of practices, and how the practices are maintained or changed collectively (see e.g. Feldman and Orlikowski 2011; Nicolini and Monteiro 2017; Reckwitz 2002).

Finally, the philosophical viewpoint for studying practices highlights the constitutive role of practices in producing social reality (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011; Nicolini and Monteiro 2017). This places emphasis on the enactment and the performative notion of reality. Schatzki (2001, 3) presents this distinct philosophical focus by arguing that ‘The social is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings’. Practices constitute social orders that provide important frameworks for sales work. These frameworks are, however, not imperative but can be collectively changed by salespersons and other actors in the sales environment, since practices are enacted though individuals (Geiger and Kelley 2014, 224). This makes the salesperson a creative and influential member of a community, instead of a lonely decision-maker, and derives the new type of research questions to be posed. For instance, how may salespersons together with other relevant actors try to change unethical practices?

**Suggestions for future practice-based sales ethics research**

To further illustrate how the practice-based view can contribute to sales ethics research, we will show how it can be applied together with marketing and organization theories in some selected sales contexts. The objective of the practice-based view is not to provide a theory, but a set of ontological and methodological commitments through which to represent and grasp the social
world (Nicolini and Monteiro 2017). In applying the practice-based view, different theories can therefore be used to further specify the angle from which to examine the practices. Depending on the study objectives, researchers can use any theory that satisfies the commitments of the practice-based view.

The practice-based view can be applied to study any type of unethical behavior identified in our review (see table 2) in order to produce new type of knowledge for sales ethics (see Table 4). However, we are proposing it as a particularly powerful approach to study unethical behavior in dynamic and complex sales settings, where various business and non-business actors affect salesperson behavior and performance. Given that unethical practices are socially and contextually situated, we consider the practice-based view ideal for the study of ethical behavior in three sales contexts: social communities, relational business environments, and global markets. These contexts have recently become important in salespersons’ work and imposed change on sales practices.

We use these three contexts as examples of domains where the practice-based view could be especially valuable in creating new knowledge on unethical behavior. Ethical issues easily arise at the interface with social communities, such as professional bodies, trade associations or social media groups, which are governed by their own interests and norms (Bush et al. 2017; Valentine and Bateman 2011). In relational business environments, the logic of relationships, reciprocal norms (Tangoping, Li, and Hung 2016), and adaptations to technological and institutional change (Hartmann, Wieland, and Vargo 2018), create systemic dependencies that stimulate unethical activities such as the formation of cartels (see e.g. Pressey and Vanharanta 2016). Operations in global markets, in turn, force organizations and their salesforce to confront different cultures and
cope with institutional surroundings with potentially conflicting ethical values (Panagopoulos et al. 2011).

To study unethical practices in these contexts, three theories are particularly useful: social network theory, business network theory, and institution theory. These theories are new or scarcely used in the sales ethics domain, and therefore offer new viewpoints in the social context of sales. Table 5 summarizes our suggestions for potential research questions, along with suitable theories to advance knowledge in the selected sales contexts.

Table 5: Suggestions for future practice-based research in three sales contexts

Table 5 near here

Social communities that connect individuals across organizational boundaries (Bush et al. 2017; Seevers, Skinner and Kelley 2007), and emerge for instance through social media (Lindsey-Mullikin and Borin 2017; Marshall et al. 2012), emphasize the role of social networks in the production of unethical practices. We thus suggest social network theory as a valuable analytical tool in this context.

Social network theory has been applied in intra-organizational studies to explain sales managers’ and salespersons’ performance (Flaherty et al. 2013; Bolander et al. 2015), but only Seevers, Skinner and Kelley (2007) have drawn attention to its value for sales ethics. The theory presumes that ongoing personal relationships provide constraints but also opportunities for unethical behavior. Strong personal relationships and equivalent positions in the social network are assumed to impose social influence on an individual and contribute to similar attitudes among actors (Brass, Butterfield, and Skaggs 1998). Through this influence, social relationships can foster both good and bad behavior from an organization’s point of view (Melé 2009). The social network theory in its various manifestations (see e.g. Borgatti and Halgin 2011), offers both the conceptual
and methodological means to measure the type and structure of social relationships, and their
effects on unethical sales behavior (Seevers, Skinner, and Kelley 2007). In the context of social
communities, the key question is: how do various social networks function as conduits for
information, resources and power to influence the formation of unethical sales practices?

The demand for value-creating solutions and services has fostered the development of
strong customer and supplier relationships in sales (Sheth and Sharma 2008; Terho et al. 2017),
and the emergence of relational business environments, or service ecosystems (Hartmann,
Wieland, and Vargo 2018). Business network theory offers a useful approach for the study of
unethical practices in this setting with its focus on the interactions across organizational boundaries
and relationships with customers, suppliers, business partners as well as non-business actors. It
provides a conceptual language to describe how actors, their activities and resources are connected
(Håkansson and Johanson 1992; Håkansson and Snehota 2017) to form, reinforce, and change
unethical sales practices, and also how interconnected business relationships may act as generators
or transmitters of change, forming channels for unethical practices to ‘emerge’ and ‘travel’
(Halinen, Salmi, and Havila 1999). The recent scandals connected to Facebook and Cambridge
Analytica provide a good example. The companies used customer data unethically to influence the
Brexit vote and US 2016 presidential elections, and this alerted the general public and legislators
around the world to question companies’ collaboration and practices in selling customer data
without the customers’ permission.

The business network theory makes a good match with the practice-based view, conceiving
practices as socially situated (La Rocca, Hoholm, and Mørk 2017), but even more importantly
extending the perspective of sales ethics to the relational context, stressing the consequences of
unethical practices to connected actors (Halinen and Jokela 2016; Lindfelt and Törnroos 2006).
With the support of this theory, researchers should examine how both business and non-business actors through their relationships affect the emergence and spread of unethical sales practices, and how the practices reproduced in business interaction create harmful consequences for other actors in the market (see Table 5).

Selling into global markets brings various institutional contradictions to the fore (Tengilimoglu, Kisa, and Ekiyor 2004). We therefore offer institution theory as a third strong candidate for the study of unethical sales practices, especially if the focus is on broader environmental contexts, such as industries, nations, or cultures. For example, bribery is often considered a socially acceptable and institutionalized practice in developing nations (Zaheer 1995). Such practices typically violate the social norms of international sales organizations and their global stakeholders, which makes them consider bribes a deviant behavior. In situations where social norms vary considerably across social groups, places and times (Tittle and Paternoster 2000), the fight against institutionalized practices becomes an issue.

Institution theory follows the basic assumptions and ideas of practice theory (Barley and Tolbert 1997). While the earlier work in institution theory mainly portrays human agency as shaped by formal macro level institutional forces, such as regulatory authorities, trade unions, and environmental agencies, recent work conceives practices as a constitutive component of such institutions; for instance, maintenance and change in institutions depend on individuals’ actions, relations, and interpretations (see, e.g., Kellogg 2009; Misangyi, Weaver, and Elms 2008). These studies comply with the ontological assumption of the practice-based view, that institutions do not form or change practices, but micro level practices form and change institutions (see Schilke Forthcoming). Sales scholars should explore how such practices become institutionalized in the market and how they can be deinstitutionalized. To change the course of negative development,
the critical questions are: How can institutionalized unethical sales practices be disrupted, and what socio-political role can sales organizations play in fighting them? We argue that by extending the focus to the constitutive role of practices, sales scholars would create a new and in practical terms highly relevant avenue for future sales ethics research.

**Discussion**

**Theoretical implications**

This article has proposed a practice-based view for the study of unethical behavior in sales. Offering an overview of the existing knowledge, introducing the practice-based view, and suggesting avenues for future practice-based research on sales ethics, we have provided an important alternative and complement to the prevailing ethical decision-making paradigm. The study breaks new ground by suggesting that unethical sales behavior should be studied as a practice situated in the social context of sales, and conceived as emerging through everyday activities and interaction with other actors in the sales environment. Supported by Geiger and Kelly (2014) to view sales as a practice, and den Nieuwenboer, Cunha, and Treviño (2017) to view unethical practices as outcomes of social production, we propose a practice turn to sales ethics research. We also suggest several suitable theories for use in combination with the practice-based view in future sales ethics research. In this way, the study answers the recent calls from scholars to strengthen the theoretical foundation of sales ethics research and to extend its perspective to the broader social context of sales (Bush et al. 2017; Ferrell, Johnston, and Ferrell 2007; McClaren 2013; 2015; McClaren, Adam and Vocino 2010).

The literature review offered an important basis for the proposed practice-based view in portraying a wide range of unethical sales behaviors that sales research has identified as relevant,
yet not studied using the practice theoretical lens. Our study showed that salespersons’ unethical behavior is the center of attention in this research field, and unethical behavior is typically examined from one actor’s perspective at a time. Studies could be categorized into those that concerned salesperson-driven unethical behavior towards other actors (the majority of studies), and those that concerned other actors’ unethical behavior towards the salespersons. Our findings related to the theories employed in research revealed a heavy reliance on the EDM perspective, despite recent studies having introduced various relational, social, economic and other theories to explain unethical behavior. The review concluded that the perspective on the social context of sales is still limited, and questions pertaining to the social dynamics and interaction with other actors have not been addressed.

To fill this gap, the study makes several suggestions for future sales ethics research. It proposes a practice-based view and invites sales ethics scholars to ask entirely new type of questions that links unethical behavior to the broader social context of sales. The practice-based view shifts the focus from studying how individuals make decisions in sales to how individuals act, and how their activities are linked to those of other actors in the sales environment. Current research grounded in the EDM view targets controlling the behavior of individual salesperson. With this emphasis, it has not been possible to address the emergence and occurrence of unethical behavior in the broader social context, in complex and dynamic sales settings, which have recently become more important in business. The practice-based view, for its part, underlines the social and systemic nature of unethical behavior. It enables the study of sales ethics in socially challenging settings, for instance in networks, institutionalized environments and ecosystems (cf. Hartmann, Wieland, and Vargo 2018), while still keeping the focus on the micro level of sales activities. As an alternative paradigm, it offers opportunities to study unethical sales behavior as an evolving
phenomenon that is produced in interaction with other actors, yet under the influence of established social orders.

The beauty of the practice-based view is that it complements the prevailing EDM view by placing an emphasis on unethical activities. The practice-based view invites sales ethics researchers to turn the study of sales management into that of sales management practices, and even the study of EDM into the study of EDM practices (Nicolini and Monteiro 2017). The EDM perspective provides a valid view on the management of unethical behavior in sales organizations. We however argue that combining research knowledge from the EDM and practice-based studies would enable scholars to suggest potentially new and even more effective means to manage unethical behavior, and more importantly, to influence it even beyond organizational boundaries. Sales research in general is practice-oriented. The practice-based view offers a valuable theoretical lens to deepen scholarly knowledge of unethical sales behavior, as it is produced as well as managed in business practice.

**Methodological implications**

Representing a paradigm shift, practice-based view also highlights the need for methodological change. Our review of over 30 years of scientific knowledge indicates that sales ethics research is heavily inclined towards the use of quantitative methods, and surveys and experiments based on hypothetical scenarios predefined by the researchers. Given that unethical practices are socially situated, they should be explored within the social context where they are enacted, with qualitative research designs in real-life settings. For instance, ethnographic studies including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and archival data, would be most useful in tracking the formation of unethical practices in their natural context (Geiger and Kelly 2014; den Nieuwenboer, Cunha, and Treviño 2017). Other suitable methodologies would include action research, where the
researcher participates in sales activities, phenomenological studies that immerse the researcher in the participants’ everyday life, and different investigations of speech and text that have the capacity to reveal the discourse around the practice. Longitudinal methods in general would be needed to disclose the dynamics related to unethical practices.

New sales technologies also provide sources of data that may enable the study of practices in complex social settings. For example, customer complaints can be tracked through online social media reviews and blogs (see, e.g., Kerrie et al. 2017; Onu and Oats 2018) to reveal unethical practices. CRM systems can be used to record and analyze unethical behavior that occurs in customer and supplier relationships. The review also pointed out the need to extend the studies geographically, as unethical practices are culturally sensitive. While past research relies heavily on samples from the United States, we suggest future studies should utilize diverse data sets from different types of economy and geographical location. Unethical practices in sales are more common in developing countries (Jacobs, Samli, and Jedlik 2001), where the study of such practices could provide valuable insights for sales ethics. Cross-cultural studies could provide a better understanding of the ethical values and social institutions that underlie unethical practices.

**Practical implications**

The potential advantage of the practice-based view is its unique ways of perceiving unethical behavior and the new opportunities it offers to influence and change potential misconduct. The proposed practice-based view suggests sales management should consider the sales environment more comprehensively to understand the formation and reinforcement of unethical practices. Management should carefully monitor unethical practices, not only within the firm but also among customers and competitors, and consider how other actors, such as NGOs, pressure groups or professional associations affect practices. A new type of knowledge of unethical behavior, of its
emergence, the actors involved, and interactions that affect it, may help firms minimize negative impacts and find effective organizational means, such as supervision, training, policies, and punishment, to monitor and manage it. The wide range of unethical activities identified in the review is valuable, for instance, in planning sales staff training. The study also highlights the need to mobilize actors in the sales environment to change prevailing practices collectively, since no single individual, nor organizational ethical code or other management practice, is capable of forming or changing a practice alone.

Limitations

Despite its useful implications, our study has some limitations. The literature review ensured the best possible coverage of business journals by sourcing via three major databases, EBSCO, ProQuest and Science Direct. However, some databases do not provide access to every year’s data for some journals, which may explain why some studies potentially evaded our search. Moreover, the search terms we employed may have missed some important studies. For example, some studies related to bribery in sales could not be found through the keywords we applied. However, we believe the secondary search criteria we employed lessened the impact of such deficiencies. We are confident that the study covers most of the high-quality publications in the field, and therefore offers a credible overview of the research foci: types of unethical sales behavior, key actors, and applied theoretical perspectives.

It is important to note, with regard to the application of the practice-based view, that the proposed research questions are only indicative and the selected social contexts serve as examples of potential settings for future study. The questions are proposed to demonstrate the value of the practice-based view and illustrate its application in sales ethics research, not to offer a comprehensive research agenda for the future. We also wish to note that the theories used in
combination with the practice lens were selected to extend our current understanding of the social
context in sales. Obviously, any theory that concurs with the ontological and epistemological
assumptions of the practice-based view may be employed. We hope our study encourages sales
researchers to explore the various possibilities the practice-based view offers for the study of sales
ethics.

Acknowledgments
Removed to ensure blind review.

References
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Networks Within Sales Organizations: Their Development and Importance for Salesperson


Figure 1. Number of published articles over time
Ethical decision-making view

Goal:
To explain salespersons’ decisions in order to predict their unethical behavior.

Focus:
Decision-making of sales individuals.

Methodological approach:
Hypothetico-deductive approach based on positivist or critical realist worldview. Use of quantitative methods.

Knowledge interest:
To identify means by which organizations can manage and control unethical behavior of salespersons

Practice-based view

Goal:
To describe and understand unethical behavior as routinized activity continuously produced within a social context.

Focus:
Routinized activities of all relevant actors.

Methodological approach:
Data-driven, inductive approach, leaning towards social constructivist worldview. Use of qualitative methods.

Knowledge interest:
To acquire knowledge of relevant activities and their linkages in order to change unethical behavior collectively.

Figure 2: Comparison of the ethical decision-making and practice-based views
Table 1. Journals and articles published on the topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Journal name</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Category 1: Key publishers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Journal of Personal Selling &amp; Sales Management</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Journal of Business Ethics</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total and percentage share</strong></td>
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<td>47 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Category 2: Frequent publishers</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Journal of Business Research</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Marketing Management Journal</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Journal of Marketing Management</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Journal of Marketing Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Industrial Marketing Management</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Total and percentage share</strong></td>
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<td>22 %</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Category 3: Occasional publishers</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>European Journal of Marketing</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Business Ethics Quarterly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Journal of Business &amp; Industrial Marketing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Service Industries Journal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Compensation and Benefits Review</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Journal of Services Marketing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Organization Science</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>American Business Review</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Health Marketing Quarterly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>International Marketing Review</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Journal of Operations Management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Journal of Euro Marketing</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Journal of Global Marketing</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Journal of Leadership, Accountability &amp; Ethics</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Journal of Marketing</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Journal of Marketing Research</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Journal of Promotion Management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Journal of Purchasing and Materials Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Journal of Retailing</td>
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<td>Purchasing and Supply Management</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Sales &amp; Marketing Management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Journal of Financial Service Professionals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>32</td>
<td>Business &amp; Society Review</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Electronic Commerce Research &amp; Applications</td>
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<td>Marketing Science</td>
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<td>Journal of Consumer Affairs</td>
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<td>International Journal of Bank Marketing</td>
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<td>Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management</td>
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<td>46</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>164</td>
<td>100 %</td>
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Table 2. Overview of unethical behavior of key actors in sales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salesperson-driven unethical behaviors towards other actors</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
<th>Other-actor driven unethical behaviors towards salesperson</th>
<th>No. of studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Towards their firm or management</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Management-driven towards salesperson</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Code and policy violations</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Poor incentive procedures and their use</td>
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<td>Misusing company resources</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Disciplinary action or punishment</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Misusing firm’s confidential information</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Lack of leadership support</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Misusing company time</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Poor design &amp; use of code of ethics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offering unauthorized discount</td>
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<td>Discrimination (e.g. quota, territory, sex)</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignoring negative history of customer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Unnecessary selling pressure</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performing dummy sales</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lack of training in ethics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unethically joining competitor</td>
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<td>Bullying</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quitting job at short notice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Towards co-workers</strong></td>
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<td>Co-worker-driven towards salesperson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking credit for others’ work</td>
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<td>Shifting blame to colleagues</td>
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<td><strong>Towards customers</strong></td>
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<td>Customer-driven towards salesperson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offering bribes &amp; gifts</td>
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<td>Asking &amp; expecting gifts, favors, &amp; bribes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exaggeration/overpromising</td>
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<td>Special treatment/price discrimination</td>
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<td>Sexual harassment</td>
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<td>Suggesting wrong products</td>
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<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Withholding information</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Facilitating backdoor selling</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of product knowledge</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lack of respect or misbehavior</td>
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<td>Misrepresentation</td>
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<td>Forcing samples on buyer</td>
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<td><strong>Towards competitors</strong></td>
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<td>Competitor-driven towards salesperson</td>
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<td>Stealing leads &amp; clients of competitors</td>
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<td>Theory category</td>
<td>Studies found</td>
<td>Theories employed</td>
<td>Focus in the social context</td>
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<td>Social</td>
<td>Bush et al. 2017</td>
<td>Occupational choice, social learning and work groups</td>
<td>Socialization theory</td>
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<td>McClaren, Adam, and Vocino 2010</td>
<td>Socialization theory</td>
<td>Socialization theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trawick, Swan, and Rink 1988.</td>
<td>Socialization theory</td>
<td>All actors in a sales community or group e.g. sales profession, sales union etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Robertson and Ross Jr 1995</td>
<td>Social contract theory</td>
<td>Workplace bullying operates through psychopathy that affects the ability to recognize ethical issues and consequently weakens EDM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valentine, Hanson, and Fleischman 2017</td>
<td>Social exchange and social learning theory</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Seveers, Skinner, and Kelley 2007</td>
<td>Social network theory</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cicala et al. 2014</td>
<td>Agency theory</td>
<td>Impact of monitoring technology on salesperson ethical behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hauser, Simester, and Wernerfelt 1997</td>
<td>Agency theory</td>
<td>Collective norms for buyers and sellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Shih and Lycogloos 2017</td>
<td>Broader-and-build theory</td>
<td>Psychological flow, i.e. state of mind, mental and emotional state, where salespersons are deeply involved in and enjoy the selling activity, in its context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hansen, Lund, and DeCarlo 2016</td>
<td>Justice theory</td>
<td>Buyer’s response to seller’s transgressions and recovery efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daumt and Harris 2014</td>
<td>Equity, power, and differential association theories</td>
<td>Reciprocal view in salesperson-customer dyad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ferrell and Ferrell 2009</td>
<td>Stakeholder theory</td>
<td>External stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>den Nijsenhuys, Cunha, and Trevith 2017</td>
<td>Organizational theory on routines</td>
<td>Hierarchical levels of a sales organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Type of new knowledge produced in practice-based sales ethics research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Viewpoint to practice</th>
<th>General objective</th>
<th>New questions for sales ethics research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Focus on what actors do</td>
<td>• What are the unethical activities that actors in the sales environment engage in?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Theoretical           | Focus on relations between the unethical activities of actors and the structures of social and organizational context | • How are actors’ unethical activities linked to each other in the sales environment? How are these activities produced in actors’ interactions? What kind of patterns do they form?  
• How do different structures in salespersons’ social and organizational context influence the formation, maintenance and change of unethical practices?  
• What is the role of different actors in forming, maintaining and changing unethical practices? |
| Philosophical         | Focus on constitutive role of practices | • How do unethical practices construct social orders for sales work and interaction?  
• How do the activities of relevant actors combine to reinforce or change a practice? |
Table 5: Suggestions for future practice-based research in three sales contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social context of sales work</th>
<th>Specific features of the context</th>
<th>Potential theory to apply</th>
<th>Examples of research questions that would add to current knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Social communities          | Selling center builds personal relationships with the buying center  
                              | Salespersons’ private and professional networks become mixed  
                              | Professional associations produce ethical codes and control unethical behavior  
                              | Social media platforms provide contacts and sales opportunities, but also deliver information on unethical behavior | Social network theory  
                              | How do the activities of selling and buying center members link to each other producing unethical practices?  
                              | How do professional contact networks, e.g. former colleagues, or friends and family, affect unethical behavior of a salesperson?  
                              | How do salespersons form communities with other actors through shared unethical activities?  
                              | How does information exchanged in the social media communities of customers or sales managers inhibit or support the emergence of unethical practices?  
                              | What are the mechanisms or processes through which social networks control their members’ behavior? |
| Relational business environment | Selling organization is connected to customers and suppliers through interdependent relationships  
                              | Connected actors apply pressure to the firm to form or change unethical practices  
                              | Firms use and combine several sales technologies to manage customer data, interaction and relationships  
                              | Unethical practices and their outcomes affect other actors in the network | Business network theory  
                              | How do the activities of key customers, suppliers and business partners affect the formation and maintenance of unethical sales practices? What are the mechanisms of influence?  
                              | What are the unintended consequences of unethical practices for connected actors, e.g. effects of bribing a business customer to end customers?  
                              | What kind of new unethical practices the use of sales technologies creates?  
                              | How and why unethical practices get spread in a specific market or industry over time? |
| Global markets              | Different social norms and ethical values prevail in culturally different markets  
                              | Potential conflicts emerge between the selling organization’s ethical code and target market practices | Institution theory  
                              | How do unethical sales activities become institutionalized? What are e.g. the society-, industry-, and company-level events that trigger institutionalization?  
                              | How are informal unethical institutions mutually constituted?  
                              | How can various business or non-business actors (NGOs, authorities, pressure groups) change prevailing unethical practices?  
                              | What socio-political roles and strategies can selling organizations use to cope with conflicting institutionalized unethical sales practices e.g. in developing markets? |
Revision notes for manuscript No: JPSSM-2017-0063.R3

Reply to the Editor

We carefully read the manuscript and removed the minor errors we found. Based on your suggestions, we have also made the following minor changes in the revised version:

1. Term ‘Zooming on’ has been replaced by ‘Zooming in on’.

2. We have maintained the consistency throughout the paper by replacing the terms ‘practice lens’, ‘practice approach’ and ‘practice view’ with the single term ‘practice-based view’. However, we still used the term ‘practice lens’ at couple of places. This was necessary because we want to emphasize that it’s a lens through which one can view practices. Also practice lens is also an established term in organization study literature from where we borrow practice-based view.

3. We have changed the name of two sub headings on page 17 and 19, and accordingly name of the tables 4 and 5 (page 49 and 50). In addition, we also included 2 more lines on page 20 to insist that practice-based view can be employed to study any unethical behaviors identified in the systematic review. Therefore, using three emerging sales contexts are for illustrative purposes to show how practice-based view combined with some theories can be applied. All these minor changes are yellow highlighted.

Finally, we are thankful for your encouraging comments and we acknowledge that 100% perfection though not possible but at least this paper can give new directions to sales ethics research.