Industrial Marketing Management xxx (xxxx) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Industrial Marketing Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/indmarman

Research paper

An antecedent and contingent outcome model of fail fast strategy in sales force management

Scott B. Friend[a,*], Jeff S. Johnson[b], Kumar Rakesh Ranjan[c]

[a] Miami University, 800 E. High Street; Oxford, OH 45056, United States
[b] University of Missouri-Kansas City, 5110 Cherry Street, Kansas City, MO 64110, United States
[c] University of Queensland, 428 Colin Clark, Brisbane, QLD 4067, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Failing fast
Sales force management
Output control
Product complexity
Managerial orientation
Extra-role behavior

ABSTRACT

Sales practice and scholarship have each called for optimizing the manner in which sales managers strategically interject themselves in the sales process. As a unique approach that reflects the high incidence rate of failure within sales, managers may strategize for salespeople to fail fast as an agile implementation of intelligent failure. Fail fast strategy allows managers to intervene early on in the business-to-business sales process in order to optimize resources and exert greater control over failures within their sales teams. With this strategy in mind, the following questions remain: Does fail fast strategy have a beneficial or deleterious effect on salesperson behaviors? What organizational- and individual-level factors direct a sales manager's strategic attention toward failing fast? The authors use an attention-based view to theorize the drivers of fail fast strategy, as well as investigate the moderating effect of sales force resources on the relationship between fail fast strategy and salesperson extra-role behaviors. The authors test the model using survey data of 274 business-to-business sales managers. The conceptualization, operationalization, and theory around fail fast strategy contribute to a better understanding of failing fast in sales. The results provide contributions to theory and practice as well as guidance for future research opportunities.

1. Introduction

The business-to-business (B2B) sales function is expensive to manage and under increasing pressure to contain costs, yet at the same time represents an indispensable driver of revenue and growth for many organizations (Skiba, Saini, & Friend, 2016, 2018). Thus, sales leaders often attempt to understand sales performance from an optimization perspective, aiming to increase sales output with low resource inputs (see Albers, Raman, & Lee, 2015). However, it is unclear when managerial interventions might be most impactful in this pursuit. While sales managers often support salespeople at the end of the sales process (i.e., closing deals), experts suggest that managerial intervention may actually be most impactful early on (Jordan & Kelly, 2015; Jordan & Vazzana, 2011). While sales scholarship highlights sales force optimization models (Albers et al., 2015) and related strategies, such as sales management cost control engagement (Skiba et al., 2018), periphery domains are emphasizing another form of opportunity management: failing fast.

Failing fast involves the concept of intelligent failures (Sitkin, 1992) and is an agile strategy aimed at the purposive timing of a failure (Khanna, Guler, & Nerkar, 2016; McGrath, 2011). While failing fast runs counter to doctrines of perseverance and grit (Belschak, Verbeke, & Bagozzi, 2006; Chaker, Zablah, & Noble, 2018), this efficiency strategy is recommended in resource-intensive pursuits where failures are common (Khanna et al., 2016; McGrath, 2011). Sales synonymously requires a resource-intensive process (Guenzi, Pardo, & Georges, 2007) and is prone to high failure rates (Boichuk et al., 2014; Bolander, Zahn, Loe, & Clark, 2017). Thus, sales research has begun to study the process of salesperson failing fast and its downstream implications (Friend, Ranjan, & Johnson, 2019). Conceptually, salespeople who learn to fail fast may benefit from preserving resources and diverting them toward more promising sales opportunities, while also taking control of failure to reduce its psychological toll.

Sales leaders may integrate a fail fast approach into their organization by developing rules of thumb that help salespeople diagnose which opportunities to pursue, while simultaneously furnishing a way to fail early. For example, a sales manager may utilize fail fast strategy by advising a salesperson to stop pursuit of a prospect when signaling indicates that the likelihood of success is low (e.g., seeing competitors influence on customer RFP; Chase & Murtha, 2019). Fail fast mindsets

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: friendsb@miamioh.edu (S.B. Friend), johnsonjs@umkc.edu (J.S. Johnson), k.ranjan@uq.edu.au (K.R. Ranjan).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.02.020
Received 23 April 2019; Received in revised form 2 December 2019; Accepted 19 February 2020
0019-8501/

are being developed in sales practice. For example, Porter Consulting advocates for sales managers to apply the principles of fail fast to sales processes within their span of control; “Sales management must make ‘fast fail’ something that is rewarded, because it bolsters sales rep performance. Make it easier for them by thinking through and defining where your solution, or the sales process, is not a fit” (Morgan, 2017). Such guidance provides leadership aimed at driving profits through conserving resources and pursuing more promising revenue generating opportunities, while also giving salespeople permission to opt out. What is less known, however, is how managers encourage failing fast when desired and how salespeople respond to failing fast as a top-down strategy. The effect of such a strategy is particularly intriguing in a sales setting, a function that largely aspires to minimize negative outcomes such as failing to close a sale (Dixon, Spiro, & Jamil, 2001).

Research into the implications of failing fast as a managerial strategy is an important augmentation of scholarship that looks at failing fast as a salesperson action (see Friend et al., 2019). Fail fast strategy is critical because the sales manager creates guidelines for employees to emulate (e.g., Mulki, Jaramillo, & Locander, 2009), thus naturally influencing salesperson behaviors. Therefore, managerial implementation of fail fast strategy is a logical starting point for inducing fail fast action. However, while scholars have called for managers to recognize the importance of failure in sales (Morris, LaForge, & Allen, 1994), it is unclear whether fail fast strategy will secure benefits or demotivate the sales force. Fail fast strategy therefore can be a double-edged sword for the firm (c.f., Alavi, Habel, Schmitz, Richter, & Wieseke, 2018). This study addresses such tension by conceptualizing fail fast strategy and assessing the downstream effects on salesperson efforts (i.e., extra-role behaviors; ERBs). Such an approach improves the nascent understanding of the failing fast concept, while also extending extant research from periphery areas that has yet to examine failing fast as a top-down strategy (e.g., Khanna et al., 2016; McGrath, 2011).

Toward this goal, we conceptualize fail fast strategy as the extent to which sales managers suggest that their salespeople exit sales opportunities early if the likelihood of closing the sale is low. Building from this conceptualization, we empirically examine the antecedents of fail fast strategy. We utilize an attention-based view (ABV) theoretical model (Ocasio, 1997) to hypothesize factors that direct sales managers toward or away from fail fast strategy. Specifically, our hypotheses suggest that a sales manager's attention toward failing fast will be influenced by both organizational (output control, product complexity) and individual (micromanagement, profit orientation) factors. Thus, we collectively propose an antecedent and outcome model of fail fast strategy, while also assessing a boundary condition affecting its efficacy. The theoretical model is tested using survey data involving 274 B2B sales managers.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. Broadly, we first conceptualize fail fast strategy and add to a body of research aimed at understanding the skills required of sales managers and the factors that foster those key skills (see Powers, Jennings, & DeCarlo, 2014). Additionally, by assessing failing fast from a managerial perspective, we meet calls to leverage insights derived from the sales manager as the unit of analysis (see Plank, Reid, Koppitsch, & Meyer, 2018). Finally, by adding a top-down perspective of failing fast to extant literature and assessing fail fast strategy's impact on salesperson ERBs, we build upon calls to include behavioral outcome variables to the failing fast literature that has otherwise only focused on revenue implications (see Friend et al., 2019).

2. Literature review

2.1. Sales failure and failure analysis

Sales failure encapsulates outcomes such as being unsuccessful at moving prospects forward, losing a deal, or unsuccessfully bidding for a sale (Johnston, Hair, Boles, & Kurtz, 1989; Mayo & Mallin, 2010). However, despite failure pervading the field of sales (Boichuk et al., 2014; Bolander et al., 2017), scholarship and practice hold a strong success orientation (Friend, Curasi, Boles, & Bellenger, 2014). Extant sales failure literature primarily focuses on what characteristics lead to failure (Johnston et al., 1989), the extent to which the salesperson is responsible for a failure (Morris et al., 1994), and salesperson attributions following failure (Dixon et al., 2001; Dixon & Schertzer, 2005).

Organizations occasionally employ failure analysis to identify areas of improvement and develop learning modules aimed at minimizing future mistakes (Gonzalez, Hoffman, & Ingram, 2005). However, while failure analysis focuses on how and why failure occurs, it ignores the aspect of *when* failure occurs (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Focusing on the when of failure within the sales pipeline (i.e., set of stages in the sales process to track prospects and opportunities, starting at lead origination and ending at customer acquisition) allows certain sentiment to be pushed aside (i.e., who is responsible for failure), instead gauging customer intent and forecasting when the salesperson should persist or move on to the next opportunity. Therefore, rather than focusing on reducing the incidence of failure (Dixon et al., 2001; Gonzalez et al., 2005) or altering the manner salespeople interpret failure (Badovick, Hadaway, & Kaminski, 1992; Dixon & Schertzer, 2005; Johnson, Friend, Rutherford, & Hamwi, 2016), this perspective shifts the focus to acceptance of failure as a part of the range of outcomes and its proactive management.

2.2. Failing fast and sales force management

Failing fast is the process of carefully informing oneself about what success and failure look like ahead of time, motivating the informed-self to derive insights to calculate the likelihood of each outcome across situations, and then proactively exiting when appropriate (McGrath, 2011). In relation to adjacent constructs established in marketing literature (e.g., working smart/hard), failing fast must be conceptually discriminated for better empirical examination. Working hard indicates the direction of applied effort or the quantum of effort (Sujan, 1986; Sujan, Weitz, & Kumar, 1994). Evidently, failing fast acumen might reduce the need to work hard and invariably precedes the need to work hard—making them causaly distict constructs. Working smart, on the other hand, is a blend of both effort and strategy (c.f., Kwak, Anderson, Leigh, & Bonifield, 2019; Rapp, Ahearne, Mathieu, & Schillewaert, 2006) which results in overall sales performance via behavioral sales performance (Fang, Palmatier, & Evans, 2004). Comparatively, while working smart is a generic strategy that might draw from capabilities (e.g., expertise, experience, creativity) to save effort while producing the same output, failing fast is a systematic way of gathering, analyzing, and making sense of information to ultimately exit a situation that is susceptible to failure (see sensemaking theoretical framework; Friend et al., 2019).

More specifically, the notion of “knowing when to pivot” (Vukotich, 2015) is a strategy for failing well (McNichol, 2007), reflecting the notion that not all failures are equal and emphasizing the importance of the timing of the failure (i.e., early failure; Khanna et al., 2016). Controlling the timing of failure can preserve resources (Mayberry, Boles, & Donthu, 2018) and safeguard a salesperson from the “dark side” of persistence (Chaker et al., 2018). These principles have been applied in a variety of contexts, such as start-ups (McNichol, 2007; Vukotich, 2015), agile marketing (Eccleschare, 2012), product innovation (Khanna et al., 2016), and venture capital (McGrath, 2011). Failing fast was also recently brought into the sales domain, conceptualized as “the salesperson's decision to stop pursuing a prospect early in the sales cycle if s/he estimates the prospect will not eventually purchase” (Friend et al., 2019, p. 2).

From a top-down perspective, embracing failure can be an important strategy that helps to “build a culture that tolerates, and sometimes even celebrates, failure [in order to]…help you use small losses to attain bigger wins over time” (McGrath, 2011, p. 76). This

strategic approach aids in establishing a psychological climate for managers to subscribe to that perhaps runs counter to alternative corporate cultures built around avoiding mistakes and applying negative meaning to failure (see Cannon & Edmondson, 2005). A psychological climate refers to environmental attributes that have acquired meaning and significance to individuals—i.e., sales management strategies as a psychological processed description of and response to surrounding organizational conditions formed at the individual level to represent the climate (Gustafson, Pomirleanu, & John-Mariadoss, 2018). Given that various sales-related psychological climates—i.e., employee perceptions of a climate emphasizing sales achievement and sales outcomes—can foster norms that shape acceptable salesperson behaviors (Ogilvie, Rapp, Bachrach, Mullins, & Harvey, 2017), such climates can be advantageous because when salespeople otherwise fear failure, they may procrastinate, avoid challenging sales tasks, and/or concentrate only on easy deals (i.e., avoidance orientation; Silver, Dwyer, & Alford, 2006).

Blind persistence also ignores critical factors that may diminish overall productivity and the ability of the salesperson to allocate scarce resources (Ahearne, Srinivasan, & Weinstein, 2004; Chaker et al., 2018), thus grounding psychological climates in resource-allocation frameworks to predict performance dimensions (Ogilvie et al., 2017). In piecemeal, managers are learning to help salespeople strategize earlier in the pipeline (Jordan & Vazzana, 2011) and organizations are beginning to embrace failure (Khanna et al., 2016). Fail fast strategy exists as a piece of such larger climates, with sales-related psychological climate providing conceptual support for the argument that this strategy acts as a mechanism of selective attention, directing salesperson behaviors. As a result, this study provides insights at the margins of the need to expand sales research on perceptual climates to uncover downstream outcomes (Gustafson et al., 2018).

In such efforts, managers can help salespeople better optimize their pipelines and, when necessary, make proper failure decisions so that salespeople can retain, protect, and build upon valued resources (e.g., time, money, energy, psychological well-being; Mayo & Mallin, 2010) following sales failures. Otherwise, salespeople may become susceptible to learned helplessness, where failure seems uncontrollable and individuals therein behave helplessly (Boichuk et al., 2014). When one combines insights regarding sales failure, failing fast, and managerial strategies aimed at pipeline management, the notion of fail fast strategy begins to take shape. However, the debate between providing proper conservation of resources versus persistence continues.

Despite competing arguments and the potential relevance of fail fast strategy, our collective review of the extant literature reveals a lack of research on how managerial focus on failing fast can affect employees. Given the pressures on sales managers to optimize sales force resources (Skiba et al., 2018), it is important to investigate fail fast strategy in this context. We propose an antecedent and outcome model of fail fast strategy (see Fig. 1), and utilize the ABV of the firm (Ocasio, 1997) as the basis of our theoretical model. Specifically, we hypothesize that organizational (output control, product complexity) and individual (micromanagement, profit orientation) factors influence sales managers' fail fast strategy. We then present an argument for fail fast strategy's impact on salesperson ERBs, along with the potential moderating influence of sales force resources.

3. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

3.1. Antecedents to fail fast strategy

We base our antecedent hypotheses on ABV. ABV has acquired prominence in work on task urgency (Lehman, Hahn, Ramanujam, & Alge, 2011) and performance (Washburn & Bromiley, 2012). Attention is defined as “the noticing, encoding, interpreting, and focusing of time and effort” relating to the available knowledge and necessary actions about a situation (Ocasio, 1997, p. 189). Managerial attention is the basis of the accuracy and speed with which information is processed in the firm (Ocasio, 1997); however it is a scarce resource (Stevens, Moray, Bruneel, & Clarysse, 2015; Yadav, Prabhu, & Chandy, 2007) and managers must process cues selectively (Mintzberg, 1973). ABV explains the expansion and contraction of managerial attention, which influences their decisions during the pursuit of strategic goals (e.g., Skiba et al., 2018).

The underlying process has three interrelated premises: focus of attention (i.e., what issue the decision-maker pays attention to), situated attention (i.e., focus is contingent on the context or the situation), and structural distribution of attention (Ocasio, 1997). Structural distribution determines the situation of the decision-maker and is shaped by the firm's rules of the game (e.g., incentives, norms), allocation of resources, and social relationships (e.g., Cho & Hambrick, 2006; Maula, Keil, & Zahra, 2013; Stevens et al., 2015). In sum, the ABV explains the decision-maker and his/her actions as determined by organizational and individual factors, which we posit affect fail fast strategy. These antecedents help managers navigate the organizational landscape by guiding or constraining behavior (Ocasio, 1997). Such factors thus shape selective attention and norms of behavior, as well as signal the importance of fail fast strategy to managers.

3.1.1. Attention to organizational factors

Structural distribution implies that firms' economic and social structures, and the way they are allocated (Maula et al., 2013), will determine the situation in which decision-makers find themselves and the issues they focus on (Johnson, Fisher, & Friend, 2019; Skiba et al., 2018). The psychological climate domain further suggests that sales manager's perceptions of organizational imperatives shape their determination of which kinds of activities and behaviors should be encouraged and rewarded (Ogilvie et al., 2017). We investigate two organizational-level factors that might affect sales manager's allocation of attention to fail fast strategy: output control and product complexity.

Output control is an organizational control system that pre-defines performance standards, compares results against those standards, and allows corrective managerial action in cases of deviation (Jaworski, 1988). With output control, managers objectively evaluate salespeople's achievement of sales targets and provide timely warnings or rewards. As such, output control may dissuade managerial interventions by placing the onus of actions and decisions onto individual salespeople. Further, output control is likely to misalign with fail fast strategy given that it (a) creates a situation of achieving pre-determined goals and (b) instills focus and attention to persist and continue with an opportunity (Miao & Evans, 2013); therein diminishing the focus and attention from exit cues when present. As organizations instill output control structures, sales managers are more likely to encourage salesperson independence and to take a “hands-off” approach to pipeline management (i.e., less focus on procedural strategies like failing fast).

H_1. : *Output control is negatively related to fail fast strategy.*

Product complexity “reflects the extent to which the products in the lines are technically complex and difficult to explain to customers” (Johnson & Sohi, 2014, p. 76). Such technicality implies a greater investment for salespeople in both learning about the product and educating customers through the sales process. As a result, the sales cycles for complex products are longer, tend to require cogent responses to customer inquiries, and create complex purchasing processes to reduce buyers' risk exposure (Brown, Zablah, Bellenger, & Donthu, 2012). This implies larger demand on attention, heightened focus on gaining product knowledge, and reduction in focus on other roles and business opportunities. However, most salespeople might not give way to these demands because attention is a finite resource (Simon & Barnard, 1947). From a strategic perspective, managers might foresee higher risks under such conditions and fear escalation of commitment (i.e., misdirected resource allocation) in pursuit of new customer opportunities (Bonney, Plouffe, & Wolter, 2014), which would create a

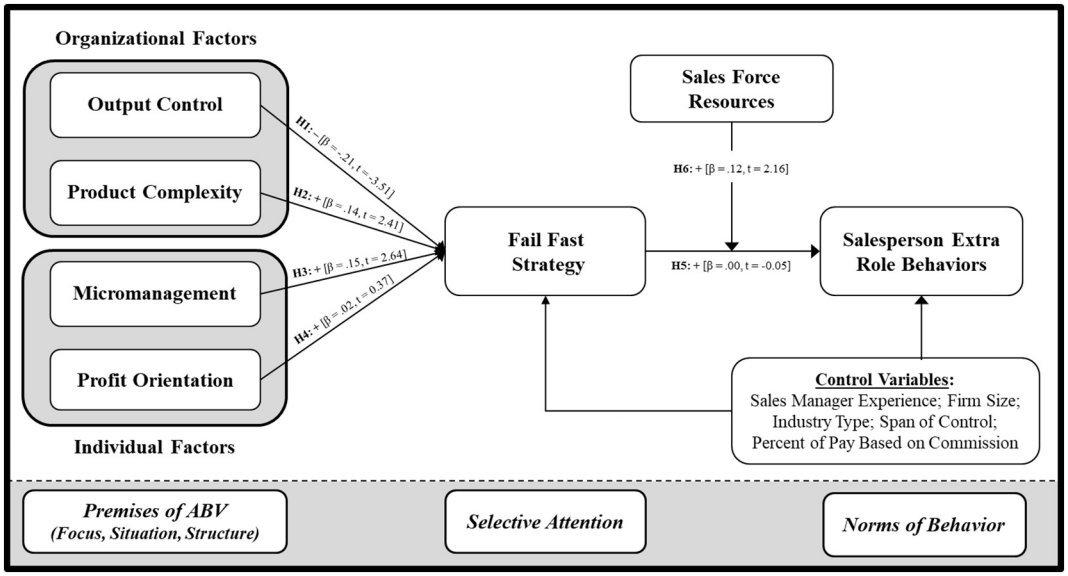

Fig. 1. Antecedent and Outcome Model of Fail Fast Strategy.

favorable situation for salespeople learning to fail fast. As such, managers would expend more attention on failure cues, making fail fast strategy more likely. Theoretically, the ABV supports the argument that sales managers are more likely to invest their efforts toward optimizing sales strategies, such as with fail fast strategy, when product complexity is high.

H_2. *Product complexity is positively related to fail fast strategy.*

3.1.2. Attention to individual factors

The ABV premise of focus of attention indicates that fundamentally, the mindset of organizational managers determines their actions and decisions (Ocasio, 1997). As such, when a sales manager is alerted to directives that are in line with his/her attentional focus, the likelihood of the manager engaging in said directives increases (Skiba et al., 2018). We look at two individual-level factors that might create alignment with fail fast strategy: micromanagement and profit orientation.

Micromanagement refers to the excessive managerial monitoring and controlling of employees' routine decisions and activities (Austin & Larkey, 1992; White, 2010). Managers utilizing this strategy provide stepwise instructions and expect salespeople within their span of control to frequently report to and consult with them (Skiba et al., 2016). Micromanagement has acquired a negative connotation due to its association with intrusion and monitoring (Gohmann, Guan, Barker, & Faulds, 2005), and can result in a trust deficit between the sales manager and the salesperson. When a manager micromanages, s/he is likely to closely monitor sales activities at all stages of the sales process and is plausibly disposed to forecast failure because s/he does not trust the salesperson to progress down the pipeline unless specified conditions align flawlessly. As such, managers are shaping the focus to exit in case need be, as well as generating a situation that is more realistic to the need to stay put or exit an opportunity. High levels of micromanagement can also create a microclimate of risk aversion (Boles, Dudley, Onyemah, Rouziès, & Weeks, 2012) and an inability to think laterally (Skiba et al., 2016). As such, these conditions strongly align micromanaging sales force management with fail fast strategy.

H_3. : *Micromanagement is positively related to fail fast strategy.*

Profit orientation is the extent to which a sales manager's goals are driven by profitability, such as return on investment (e.g., Jacobson & Aaker, 1985). Managers high in profit orientation favor sales strategies that increase their teams' margins (Skiba et al., 2018). Such managers not only keep an eye on optimizing sales revenues and guide the salesperson's focus with a client accordingly, they are also conscious of improving relative inputs (i.e., situational costs around a sales call) to leverage both facets of profitability. Thus, when sales managers focus on measuring their sales force by profitability, failing fast may instill sales optimization given its approach. In addition, managers high in profit orientation closely monitor resource expenditures and prioritize activities that best allocate resources to the right opportunities.

H_4. : *Profit orientation is positively related to fail fast strategy.*

3.2. Outcome of fail fast strategy

Failing fast is central to the managerial and salesperson idea of optimal usage of effort, as well as alternative application of the effort saved through failing fast action. Effort is “the force, energy, or activity by which work is accomplished” (Brown & Peterson, 1994, p. 71). ERBs encompass such discretionary effortful behavior and are recognized as a set of sales activities which have salutary impact on the firm (Dubinsky & Skinner, 2002). Specifically, ERBs are an important outcome for the firm (Christensen & Whiting, 2018) and widely recognized in managing frontline employees (see Deery, Rayton, Walsh, & Kinnie, 2017; Hu, Jiang, Mo, Chen, & Shi, 2016). Therefore, we examine salesperson ERBs as the focal outcome in this study.

Salesperson ERBs refer to the degree to which salespeople partake in discretionary efforts beyond their formal job descriptions (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearne, 1998; Netemeyer, Maxham, & Pullig, 2005). Examples of salesperson ERBs include helping customers with unrelated problems, coming in early or staying late to better serve a customer, treating customers in a generous manner to deliver customer delight, spending time gathering market intelligence for the greater good of the company, sharing knowledge by offering field training in their territory to novice salespeople, and volunteering expertise to support customer initiatives. It is important to study ERBs because salesperson expectancies and behavioral responses vary based on the manner in which the salesperson interprets failure, with the manager being essential to shaping such interpretations (Dixon & Schertzer, 2005; Johnson et al., 2016). Salesperson ERBs are also important given that sales performance requires allocating energy to relevant tasks (Fang et al., 2004; Jaramillo & Mulki, 2008; Sujan et al., 1994). We expect that sales manager's fail fast strategy will favorably affect salesperson ERBs based

on underlying theoretical mechanisms.

Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) posits that an individual will behave in a certain manner if s/he expects a favorable result (Johnston & Marshall, 2013). This is consistent with logic that suggests sales volume and resource preservation gains can be achieved via failing fast and optimally allocating sales efforts across planning activities (Friend et al., 2019; Mayberry et al., 2018). Strategically advising for quick failures can also help salespeople to avoid depleting their resources on losing propositions, move toward their goals faster, and preserve their motivation; "And the human benefits of fail fast should not be overlooked. If people feel that a project's failure will doom them to months of waiting for another project, or to losing their jobs, then failure is demoralizing. But if lots is going on and the conclusion of one effort means that they'll immediately get put on another (possibly more interesting) project, then endings can be positive" (McGrath, 2011, pp. 80–81). This postulation suggests that when the manager inoculates the sales force from the burden of early exits, this act could alleviate stressors associated with downstream failures, improve perceived managerial support, and increase the accuracy of salespeople's expectancy (see Skiba et al., 2018). Further, to the extent that fail fast strategy is perceived as an improvement in managerial support, the sales force is subsequently expected to be motivated to engage in effortful ERBs (see Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). By improving the accuracy of salespeople's expectancy, fail fast strategy can drive salesperson efforts that help ensure that customer purchase intent remains intact (Netemeyer et al., 2005).

H_5. : *Fail fast strategy is positively related to salesperson extra-role behaviors.*

3.3. Fail fast strategy moderating condition

Failure in itself is a rather path dependent variable, varying in perspective depending on the people involved and internal environment (Khanna et al., 2016; Morris et al., 1994). Based on our review of the job-demands resource theory literature (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), we identify sales force resources as a boundary condition for the impact of fail fast strategy on salesperson ERBs.

Sales force resources refer to the range of alternatives the sales force has at its disposal to customize customer offerings and solve customer problems (John & Weitz, 1989). Salespeople are generally less anxious under fewer resource constraints (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Boles, 2011), and low resource fluctuations can positively affect their professional endeavors (Boles, Johnston, & Hair, 1997). Thus, the efficiency gained from fail fast strategy may ease salespeople's time constraints, which can be productively directed using sales force resources. As such, when fail fast strategy and sales force resources are both high, salespeople are more likely to exceed their roles given that they have both the time and resources to do so. This argument is aptly applied to failing fast and the notion that greater resources allow for the possibility of learning; whereas when employees feel constrained by low levels of resources, they have little choice but to wait until the final outcome before assessing their performances as successes or failures (see Khanna et al., 2016). Greater sales force resources will therefore accentuate the impact of fail fast strategy on salesperson ERBs (i.e., the salesperson's ability to follow a fail fast approach when necessary in order to allocate discretionary efforts in a meaningful manner).

H_6. : *Sales force resources moderate the impact of fail fast strategy on salesperson extra-role behavior, such that as sales force resources increase, the impact of fail fast strategy on salesperson extra-role behaviors becomes stronger.*

4. Methodology

To empirically test our hypotheses, we collected survey data from full-time, B2B sales managers with at least one year of experience in managing salespeople in an organization. A professional data collection company (Qualtrics) collected the surveys based upon our selection criteria. Any participants not fitting the requirements for the sample (e.g., salesperson vs. sales manager; part-time vs. full-time; B2C vs. B2B; self-employed vs. part of an organization) were screened out. Data collection and analysis occurred over two iterations: a pretest and a main collection.

4.1. Measures and pretest

Our focal variable, fail fast strategy, was measured on a six-item scale adapted from Friend et al. (2019). The focus of the items remained intact; however, the items were changed from a salesperson's act of failing fast to a sales manager's fail fast strategy. The dependent variable of salesperson ERBs was measured using a five-item scale from Netemeyer et al. (2005). Regarding the antecedents, output control was measured using a five-item scale from Jaworski, Stathakopoulos, and Krishnan (1993), and product complexity with a five-item scale from Johnson and Sohi (2014). Micromanagement and profit orientation were respectively operationalized with four-item scales from Skiba et al. (2016) and Skiba et al. (2018). The moderating variable, sales force resources, was measured with a three-item scale from John and Weitz (1989). Lastly, several control variables were included in the model to account for variance in the endogenous and dependent variable. Single-item measures of sales manager experience, firm size, industry type, span of control, and percent of pay based on commission were included. These control variables are consistent with research examining similar sales-related phenomena (Serviere-Munoz & Mallin, 2013; Wu & Cavusgil, 2006). The Appendix provides our study's scale items.

While all the scales used in our model are adapted from established scales in the literature, we nevertheless conducted a pretest to ensure that adapted measures were appropriate for our context. We obtained 100 completed surveys for pretesting using the same data collection company and sampling criteria. These data were solely used for the pretest analysis, with the subsequent main collection comprising unique participants and data. We analyzed the pretest data to determine the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of all included scales. All scales returned acceptable psychometric properties on these three assessment dimensions; thus, we proceeded with the main data collection.

4.2. Main collection

For the main collection, panel participants were invited to participate in the survey. Participants were asked a series of screening questions to further specify the target audience. After removing participants who failed to meet the inclusion parameters (i.e., full-time, B2B sales managers with at least one year of experience in managing salespeople) and those providing incomplete data, 274 surveys were available for analysis. The participating sales managers were relatively gender-balanced (57.7% female) and had extensive sales management experience (mean 11.7 years). Additionally, the resulting sample comprised participants from both product-based (50.4%) and service-based (49.6%) industries.[1] Participants represented many industry subsectors, such as

[1] We ran a post-hoc test including industry type as a moderator to assess if the effect of fail fast strategy on our dependent variable may be predicated on whether it occurs in a product-based or service-based context. The result of this test was a non-significant coefficient ($p > .05$), indicating the association is not moderated by industry type.

agriculture, chemical products, commercial finance and insurance, computers and electronics, healthcare, information technology, and transportation.[2]

4.3. Reliability and validity

We assessed construct reliability by computing coefficient alphas (see Table 1) and composite reliabilities (see Appendix) for each scale in the analysis. All coefficient alphas and composite reliabilities exceeded 0.70, indicating adequate reliability (Nunnally, 1978). We also performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the measurement model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The fit of the measurement model fell within acceptable parameters (χ^2 (443) = 689.71, $p < .01$, CFI = 0.96, IFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.06). Regarding convergent validity, every item loaded on its respective construct in excess of 0.50 and loadings were over two times the standard error (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) for each scale, except the three-item sales force resources construct (0.49), was above the recommended 0.50 value (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). We assessed discriminant validity by comparing the AVEs to the construct inter-correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVEs exceeded all squared inter-correlations in support of discriminant validity.

4.4. Common method variance

Our data were obtained from a single source (B2B sales managers) to acquire perspective on organizational and individual factors germane to fail fast strategy, and ERBs of the salespeople within the manager's span of control. As such, we needed to both lessen and empirically account for common method variance (CMV). We used several established approaches to lessen CMV, including assuring respondent anonymity, reducing evaluation apprehension by indicating there are no correct or incorrect answers to the survey items, and varying our scale anchors (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Rindfleisch, Malter, Ganesan, & Moorman, 2008). Beyond these reduction techniques, we also accounted for CMV empirically by using the Unmeasured Latent Method Factor (ULMF) technique. We incorporated a common factor into a CFA model whereby each item was loaded to its construct, in addition to the common method factor, to extract CMV (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012).

4.5. Model estimation

EQS 6.3 Structural Equations Modeling Software was used to perform the analysis. We used latent variable scores to assess the relationships proposed in the conceptual model (Jöreskog & Yang, 2000), a commonly-used approach in sales and marketing research (e.g., Johnson & Sohi, 2017; Ye, Marinova, & Singh, 2012). To conduct latent variable score analysis, first latent factor scores were extracted from the CFA. Latent factor scores are superior to averaged construct composites, as they factor in measurement error. The extraction included the ULMF to account for CMV left unaccounted for, which could otherwise inflate associations among the latent variables in the analysis. After extraction, latent factor scores were utilized to assess a structural model of predicted and control variables on their outcomes. Interaction terms were computed by multiplying latent variable scores for the proposed moderated relationship (Schumacker, 2002).

[2] To assure our results were generalizable and not industry specific, we collected data from a wide array of over 30 industries. As such, we use a broad industry control (i.e., products, service) versus a specific industry control given the disadvantages of including 30-layer categorical variable as a control.

4.6. Results

This research hypothesized that output control (H1) will decrease the manager's utilization of fail fast strategy, while product complexity (H2), micromanagement (H3), and profit orientation (H4) will increase the utilization of fail fast strategy. H4 is not supported, as profit orientation's relationship was not significant ($\beta = 0.02$, $p > .05$). However, H1, H2, and H3 are supported because output control ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < .01$), product complexity ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < .05$), and micromanagement ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .01$) are each significantly associated with fail fast strategy. Moving downstream, fail fast strategy does not have a significant effect on salesperson ERBs ($\beta = 0.00$, $p > .05$), thus failing to support H5. Lastly, H6, which theorized a positive moderation of sales force resources on the fail fast strategy-salesperson ERB relationship, is supported ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < .05$). We provide a summary of the results in Table 2, along with model fit statistics.

5. Discussion

Recognizing the potential of a top-down approach that advocates for failing fast to both sales managers and salespeople, our study conceptualizes the phenomenon of fail fast strategy. Managers are the critical bridge between firm culture and the orientation and performance of its frontline employees. We assess the managerial strategy of failing fast by explaining its drivers and how ensuing selling effort is contingently realized. Importantly, our findings support the moderating role of sales force resources on the fail fast strategy-salesperson ERB relationship. High sales force resources positively shift fail fast strategy's impact on salesperson ERBs, while low sales force resources affect the relationship negatively. Fig. 2 illustrates the plot of this interaction at minus one standard deviation (−1), the mean (0), and plus one standard deviation (1) levels of fail fast strategy and ERBs (with low/high sales force resources set as minus one standard deviation and plus one standard deviation respectively). This interaction suggests that if sales managers implement fail fast strategy, they must provide their salespeople with sufficient resources to selectively engage with the strategy, learn from the failure, and understand where to optimally engage their discretionary efforts. In contrast, low sales force resources restrict the salesperson's efforts and, when combined with fail fast strategy, can frustrate the salesperson to result in disengagement and lower levels of ERBs.

Regarding the antecedents, we sought to understand organizational- and individual-level factors that affect the manager's attention to fail fast strategy. In support of ABV foundations that suggest external and internal conditions may drive managerial attention, our study supports that such factors are essential to fostering fail fast strategy. Specifically, organizations using output control signal managers to avoid fail fast strategies while those possessing a portfolio of complex products signal managers about the appropriateness of fail fast strategy. Additionally, managers who micromanage their salespeople align well with the strategic focus on failing fast. Surprisingly, however, a manager's profit orientation is not associated with fail fast strategy, thus suggesting that failing fast as a top-down strategy is not motivated by a prioritization of sales team profitability. Rather, other soft costs may influence this strategy.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This research contributes to the sales force management literature in several ways. First, we conceptualize failing fast as a strategy from which sales-driven firms can benefit. Specifically, scholars have called for managers to recognize the strategic importance of failure in sales (Morris et al., 1994). Our study focuses on failing fast as an approach that can expand sales managers' roles in directing sales effort on the frontline and shaping the orientation of the strategic team at the top. We unravel these two objectives by studying the effect of several key

Table 1
Factor Correlations and Descriptive Statistics.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Fail Fast Strategy	(0.90)[c]											
2	Output Control	-.24[a]	(0.83)										
3	Product Complexity	.14[b]	0.06	(0.89)									
4	Micromanagement	.21[a]	-.21[a]	0.06	(0.83)								
5	Profit Orientation	−0.01	0.10	0.02	0.03	(0.83)							
6	Sales Force Resources	-.16[b]	.27[a]	−0.04	-.25[a]	.16[a]	(0.73)						
7	Salesperson Extra-Role Behaviors	−0.03	0.08	0.09	-.22[a]	0.09	.33[a]	(0.94)					
8	Sales Manager Experience	0.04	−0.08	−0.01	0.04	0.06	0.02	−0.03	–				
9	Firm Size	0.06	0.12	.14[b]	−0.03	−0.09	−0.07	−0.09	0.06	–			
10	Industry Type[d]	−0.04	−0.04	0.03	0.01	−0.05	0.02	0.01	-.15[b]	0.05	–		
11	Percent Commission	−0.11	.17[a]	0.02	−0.03	0.11	0.10	0.10	.14[b]	−0.06	0.01	–	
12	Span of Control[e]	0.01	.16[a]	−0.10	0.07	0.09	.15[b]	0.01	0.01	.14[b]	-.19[a]	0.02	–
Mean		3.09	5.53	3.58	2.27	5.13	5.58	5.66	11.71	2.81	0.50	36.04	16.62
Standard Deviation		1.22	1.12	1.43	1.11	1.03	0.99	0.99	7.91	1.99	–	31.07	34.27
AVE		0.61	0.53	0.63	0.56	0.56	0.49	0.76	–	–	–	–	–

[a] Significant at 0.01.
[b] Significant at 0.05 (all unmarked correlations are non-significant).
[c] Coefficient alphas provided in parentheses along the diagonal.
[d] Point biserial correlations for binary dummy variable for product versus service industry.
[e] Measured as the "number of subordinates that a particular supervisor leads" (Sabatino, 2016, p. 1926).

Table 2
Standardized coefficient results.

	Fail fast strategy	Salesperson ERBs
Independent variables		
Output control	**-.21**[a,c]	
Product complexity	**.14**[b]	
Micromanagement	**.15**[a]	
Profit orientation	0.02	
Endogenous variable		
Fail fast strategy		0.00
Moderating variable main effect		
Sales force resources		.32[a]
Moderating variable interaction effect		
Fail fast strategy x sales force resources		**.12**[b]
Controls		
Sales manager experience	0.01	−0.05
Firm size	0.07	−0.05
Industry type	−0.05	−0.01
Percent commission	−0.07	0.06
Span of control	0.01	−0.08
R-Squared	0.12	0.14

Model Fit (χ^2 (7) = 13.90, p = .05, CFI = 0.96, IFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.02.)
[a] Significant coefficients at 0.01.
[b] Significant coefficients at 0.05.
[c] Supported hypotheses in bold.

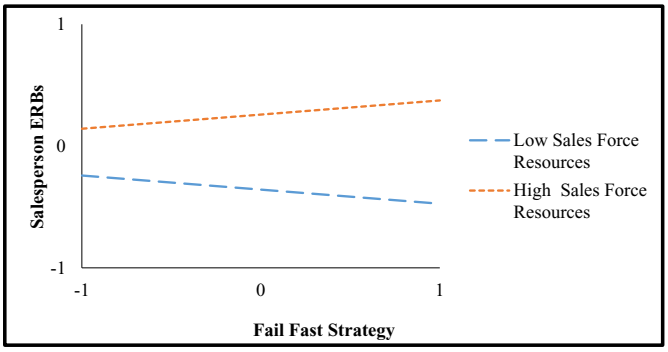

Fig. 2. Moderating Effect of Sales Force Resources [a].
[a] Post-hoc simple slopes test reveals a positive, non-significant slope for high sales force resources (gradient of slope = 0.11, p. > 0.05) and a negative, non-significant slope for low sales force resources (gradient of slope =. −0.08, p. > 0.05). The difference between high/low sales force resources at high fail fast strategy is significant. (t = 7.22, p. < 0.01).

constructs as antecedents of this managerial strategy, as well as the manner in which sales force resources moderate the effect of fail fast strategy on salesperson ERBs. Our results increase understanding both the skills required of sales managers and the factors that foster those skills (Powers et al., 2014), as well as a need to develop such insights derived from the sales manager as the unit of analysis (Plank et al., 2018).

Second, this study theoretically extends the emerging stream of literature focused on failing fast. Failing fast has manifested in periphery domains (e.g., Khanna et al., 2016) and has potential for extension within sales, thus encouraging related explorations (e.g., Chaker et al., 2018; Mayberry et al., 2018). However, the direct extensions of failing fast in the sales domain remains limited and focused at the level of the salesperson. This study bolsters such research, while also offering additional insight into the domain of intelligent failure (Sitkin, 1992) and the purposive timing of failures (McGrath, 2011), which is applicable to a sales context given the resource-intensive nature of the sales process (Guenzi et al., 2007) and pervasiveness of failures (Boichuk et al., 2014; Bolander et al., 2017). Our findings also speak to extant sales failure literature, which commonly focuses on understanding attributions following sales failure (e.g., Dixon et al., 2001; Dixon & Schertzer, 2005); with our approach involving strategizing failing fast attributes a priori to enable salespeople to assume greater control of impending failures.

Third, while failing fast has been investigated across contexts at the individual-level (e.g., Khanna et al., 2016), the upstream drivers of a fail fast approach are less understood. Logically, it has been suggested that the pursuit of any strategic goal by a salesperson needs keen managerial intent and orientation (Flaherty & Pappas, 2009), and it has been increasingly emphasized that managers' roles in sales need to be enhanced (Fu, Richards, Hughes, & Jones, 2010). A manager's attention to fail fast strategy is one potential mechanism to foster downstream adoption. The investigation of failing fast as a top-down approach thus further contributes to the failing fast literature. While scholarship has recognized the potential management has to promote talking about and learning from failure (Boichuk et al., 2014; McGrath, 2011), as well as strategizing with salespeople to identify positive and negative customer intent indicators (Chaker et al., 2018), this study represents a novel inquiry into a specific managerial approach to do so.

We also identify multiple organizational-level (e.g., output control,

product complexity) and individual-level (e.g., micromanagement) factors that impact fail fast strategy among sales managers, thus extending the empirical application of the ABV (Ocasio, 1997). As a means of being further instructive to understanding our results, we discuss potential rationales as to why this study may fail to support the logical development of non-significant hypotheses. Specifically, the logic for H4 is built upon the ABV principle of focus of attention, which indicates that the mindset of the sales manager (i.e., profit orientation) should help determine his/her actions (i.e., fail fast strategy). One would therefore expect that as a sales manager places emphasis on strategies that increase sales team revenues and decrease relative inputs, s/he will therein gravitate toward fail fast strategy. Our results, however, suggest that is not necessarily the case. Rather, profit orientation and fail fast strategy are unrelated. This finding indicates that fail fast strategy is not aligned with profit orientation as a focus of attention; implying some profit-oriented managers conceptualize fail fast strategy as a profit-promoting strategy given the reduced inputs associated with a fail fast strategy, while others view it as a strategy that reduces positive outcomes that could be gained through perseverance and grit. Such variance can explain why, in aggregate, no effect manifests between these variables.

Additionally, the non-significant effect of failing fast on salesperson ERBs is intriguing. This lack of a direct linkage may mean that if a top-down fail fast strategy does preserve salesperson time through early exits, salespeople may not (or only contingently) in turn substitute this time back into sales activities through ERBs. As a result, we were motivated to consider possible alternative explanations. In this pursuit, a competing line of reasoning suggests that the focus of managerial attention on efficiency considerations will result in poor sales and performance (Rust, Moorman, & Dickson, 2002; Van Doorn, Jansen, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2013). Thus, one could argue for fail fast strategy to have an adverse impact on salesperson ERBs to the extent that managerial emphasis demotivates the sales force, increases stress, or implicitly prioritizes minimizing inputs over maximizing outputs. As such, when managers adopt fail fast strategy, the failure rate of their salespeople can increase. In turn, the outcome of losing a sale is then expected to adversely impact employee morale and effort (Mayo & Mallin, 2010; Sujan, 1986; Sujan, Sujan, & Bettman, 1988; Sujan, Weitz, & Sujan, 1988) and can result in disingenuous salesperson behavior (Boichuk et al., 2014). Simply put, failure and exit from an ongoing sales call can exacerbate the pressure to begin new sales cycles, which can lead to a disinclination toward ERBs. Additionally, resource controls can increase salesperson workload (i.e., do more with less) and make sales efforts more difficult (see Colletti & Chonko, 1997). Thus, these competing arguments may suppress the direct effect of fail fast strategy on salesperson ERBs.

5.2. Managerial implications

Sales managers are charged with achieving requisite output from their salespeople within a desired level of resource input (Skiba et al., 2016, 2018). These goals have increasingly pushed the field toward optimization modeling (Albers et al., 2015). However, managers must also recognize the human-level implications of imposing input constraining strategies on their salespeople. As a mechanism to potentially balance that tension, managers have been advised to divest support to salespeople when the sales call is at the closing stage and instead invest efforts in early stages (i.e., pipeline management) (Jordan & Kelly, 2015; Jordan & Vazzana, 2011). Fail fast strategy helps salespeople preserve their scarce resources for high potential opportunities.

Fail fast strategy also celebrates an intelligent failure mentality. Where organizations see value in managers adopting fail fast strategy, certain structures can be put in place or avoided. For example, we find a strong positive direct effect of product complexity on the pursuit of fail fast strategy and suggest that a delayed exit can be expensive if the complex product involves a lengthy sales process. Thus, organizations can advocate for fail fast strategy to managers operating in contexts with complex products. Conversely, installing output controls could help organizations deter managers from fail fast strategy. Outcome controls shift the onus of results to the salesperson and dissuade managers from fail fast strategy. Managers must be cognizant of such organizational signals and their implications.

Further, fail fast strategy should be utilized when boundary conditions help create more favorable downstream outcomes. This study depicts the moderating role of sales force resources on the fail fast strategy-salesperson ERB relationship, offering important managerial implications. Specifically, when utilizing fail fast strategy, sales managers need to provide sufficient resources that enable salespeople to meaningfully allocate discretionary efforts. Providing salespeople with an array of viable alternatives for customers, or training them on how to customize their offerings to meet customer needs, can help fuel sales force resource perceptions and accentuate the desirable influence of fail fast strategy.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

Our findings should be interpreted within the limitations posed by survey research. While the data collection across a large sample of different firms captured the variance needed to assess the antecedent and outcome model of fail fast strategy (e.g., output control, product complexity, sales force resources), the approach also precludes specificity regarding singular organizations. Future research efforts could investigate various efficiency driven objective and subjective types of outcomes that are idiosyncratic to entities. These possibilities are further strengthened by this study which examines a more proximal behavioral outcome (i.e., ERBs), which in turn can act as a processual construct in explaining more distal efficiency-based outcomes of failing fast.

The cross-sectional nature of our surveys is a limitation, as it may mask important insights regarding fail fast strategy's impact over time. A longitudinal assessment could show the effects of fluctuating variable conditions. Failing fast works as a strategy when one is able to learn from failures across an extended time span (Khanna et al., 2016). In addition to this longitudinal facet of failing fast, evolving market conditions are also likely to influence the appropriateness of the approach and gains/losses realized. As the marketplace rapidly changes, failing fast may be an advisable strategy in that it allows the sales force to pursue myriad opportunities. Conversely, it may make sense for the sales force to persevere given that time with a prospect is requisite to work through emergent circumstances and craft a solution to fit their new reality. As such, assessments of fail fast strategy that capture both fluctuating and longitudinal outcomes (i.e., measures which separate short-term tensions associated with failing fast from long-term gains) are promising lines of future inquiry. Longitudinal efforts could explore the influence of fail fast strategy under various conditions, while also spurring more sales failure research that assesses various phenomena over time (Boichuk et al., 2014).

Another potential limitation is that the data collection is single-source. While extant research has advocated for more strategic insights being developed with the sales manager as the unit of analysis (see Plank et al., 2018), the field has also advocated for research to employ multilevel-multisource (MLMS) approaches to answer key questions involving sales managers, salespeople, and customers (Johnson, Friend, & Horn, 2014). Future research could assess the nested impact of fail fast strategy, from the manager down through to the customer. For example, additional assessments specific to the sales manager's strategizing for the salesperson through pipeline management and subjective evaluations from the salesperson's perspective (e.g., job satisfaction, turnover intentions) would increase understanding of the attitudinal responses to a top-down fail fast approach. Moving downstream, customers could also benefit from improved processes in failure analysis and recovery efforts (e.g., improved likelihood that the sales process

will result in a positive outcome; Gonzalez et al., 2005), but may also react adversely if inaccurately pushed out of the sales process (Chaker et al., 2018). Capturing such MLMS linkages will illuminate whether the employee- and customer-based benefits of fail fast strategy outweigh the costs.

Finally, there are many other contingencies that could be included in future inquiries to understand the effect of failing fast strategy on downstream outcomes. As one example, product characteristics (e.g., new vs. existing products) tend to alter the average sales cycle length. Future scholarship could assess such nuances, as research indicates salespeople of new products need to be more protective of their time as a scarce resource because customers use salespeople in such circumstances to learn about new market opportunities but do not necessarily have intent to purchase (Steenburgh & Ahearne, 2018). Thus, such product characteristics could be valuable to assess as they relate to failing fast.

6. Conclusion

This study elaborates on the notion of failing fast as a top-down strategy while highlighting critical areas for future research. Failing fast on the frontline can result in resource conservation. However, its field-level implementation is more feasible when there is a strategic intent from the top and a favorable organizational environment. Managers are a critical linkage between organizational leadership and the tactical frontline, and fail fast strategy is one such bridging mechanism that can make failing fast an implementable reality.

Funding sources

This research project was funded with support from the Sales Education Foundation (SEF) Research Grant Program. The authors, therefore, acknowledge technical and financial support of SEF.

Appendix A. Appendix. Constructs, Items, and Composite Reliabilities

Fail Fast Strategy [Adapted from Friend et al., 2019; Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree; CR[a] = 0.90]
To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following?

1. I encourage my salespeople to withdraw from a deal early in the sales process if past experiences indicate that ultimately they will not win the deal.
2. I tell my salespeople to exit a sales opportunity early if something indicates that the likelihood of rejection is high.
3. I advise my salespeople to exit selling situations early when they are similar to previous unsuccessful sales opportunities.
4. I counsel my salespeople to exit sales opportunities early on in the pipeline if the deal seems unwinnable.
5. I instruct my salespeople to end pursuit of certain prospects based on past outcomes in similar client contexts.
6. I coach my salespeople to exit sales opportunities early by recalling negative signals that hint the outcome with a prospect is highly uncertain.

Output Control [Jaworski et al., 1993; Never/Always; CR = 0.85]
Please assess the frequency with which, in your sales team:

1. Specific performance goals are established for my salespeople's job.
2. The extent to which my salespeople attain their performance goals is monitored.
3. If my salespeople's performance goals were not met, my salespeople would be required to explain why.
4. My salespeople receive feedback concerning the extent to which they achieve their goals.
5. My salespeople's pay increases are based upon how their performance compares with their goals.

Product Complexity [Johnson & Sohi, 2014; Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree; CR = 0.89]
To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following?

1. The products my salespeople handle are very complex and difficult to explain to customers.
2. The products my salespeople handle are simple to understand and easy to explain to customers. (R)[b]
3. My salespeople need a lot of technical knowledge to sell our products.
4. It takes a lot of effort for my salespeople to explain the features of our products to customers.
5. It takes a lot of effort for my salespeople to explain the uses/applications of our products to customers.

Micromanagement [Skiba et al., 2016; Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree; CR = 0.83]
To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following?

1. I think micromanaging my sales team is the best way to get results.
2. I don't trust the quality of work of my sales team unless I have helped with the decisions every step of the way.
3. In order to be effective, I need to instruct my sales team down to the smallest details of their jobs.
4. I get upset if my sales team does not consult with me on their day-to-day decisions.

Profit Orientation [Skiba et al., 2018; Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree; CR = 0.83]
To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following?

1. Sales team profitability is my priority.
2. Sales team profitability is a key output measure of mine.
3. Profitability of the sales team is the most important metric to me.
4. I always look at how much margin my sales team is bringing in.

Sales Force Resources [Adapted from John & Weitz, 1989; Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree; CR = 0.74]
To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following?

1. My salespeople have a wide range of alternatives to offer the customer.
2. My salespeople can tailor their offerings to match the customer's needs.
3. My salespeople can be very helpful in terms of assisting the customer in solving his or her problems.

Salesperson Extra-Role Behaviors [Adapted from Netemeyer et al., 2005; Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree; CR = 0.94]
To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following?

1. My salespeople regularly go above and beyond the “call of duty.”
2. My salespeople are regularly willing to go out of their way to make others satisfied.
3. My salespeople voluntarily go beyond job requirements in their daily work.
4. My salespeople often help with problems beyond what is expected or required.
5. My salespeople are often willing to go the extra mile to help others.

[a] CR = Composite Reliability.
[b] R = Reverse-coded Item.

References

Ahearne, M., Srinivasan, N., & Weinstein, L. (2004). Effect of technology on sales performance: Progressing from technology acceptance to technology usage and consequence. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 24*(4), 297–310.

Alavi, S., Habel, J., Schmitz, C., Richter, B., & Wieseke, J. (2018). The risky side of inspirational appeals in personal selling: When do customers infer ulterior salesperson motives? *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 38*(3), 323–343.

Albers, S., Raman, K., & Lee, N. (2015). Trends in optimization models of sales force management. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 35*(4), 275–291.

Anderson, J. C., & Gerbing, D. W. (1988). Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychology Bulletin, 103*(3), 411–423.

Austin, R., & Larkey, P. (1992). The unintended consequences of micromanagement: The case of procuring mission critical computer resources. *Policy Sciences, 25*(1), 3–28.

Badovick, G. J., Hadaway, F. J., & Kaminski, P. F. (1992). Attributions and emotions: The effects on salesperson motivation after successful vs. unsuccessful quota performance. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 12*(3), 1–11.

Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (1988). On the evaluations of structural equation models. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 16*(1), 74–94.

Belschak, F., Verbeke, W., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2006). Coping with sales call anxiety: The role of sale perseverance and task concentration strategies. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 34*(3), 403–418.

Boichuk, J. P., Bolander, W., Hall, Z. R., Ahearne, M., Zahn, W. J., & Nieves, M. (2014). Learned helplessness among newly hired salespeople and the influence of leadership. *Journal of Marketing, 78*(1), 95–111.

Bolander, W., Zahn, W. J., Loe, T. W., & Clark, M. (2017). Managing new salespeople's ethical behaviors during repetitive failures: When trying to help actually hurts. *Journal of Business Ethics, 144*(3), 519–532.

Boles, J. S., Dudley, G. W., Onyemah, V., Rouziès, D., & Weeks, W. A. (2012). Sales force turnover and retention: A research agenda. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 32*(1), 131–140.

Boles, J. S., Johnston, M. W., & Hair, J. F. (1997). Role stress, work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion: Inter-relationships and effects on some work-related consequences. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 17*(1), 17–28.

Bonney, L., Plouffe, C. R., & Wolter, J. (2014). "I think I can… I think I can": The impact of perceived selling efficacy and deal disclosure on salesperson escalation of commitment. *Industrial Marketing Management, 43*(5), 826–839.

Brown, B. P., Zablah, A. R., Bellenger, D. N., & Donthu, N. (2012). What factors influence buying center brand sensitivity? *Industrial Marketing Management, 41*(3), 508–520.

Brown, S. P., & Peterson, R. A. (1994). The effect of effort on sales performance and job satisfaction. *Journal of Marketing, 58*(2), 70–80.

Cannon, M. D., & Edmondson, A. C. (2005). Failing to learn and learning to fail (intelligently): How great organizations put failure to work to innovate and improve. *Long Range Planning, 38*(3), 299–319.

Chaker, N. N., Zablah, A. R., & Noble, C. H. (2018). More than one way to persist: Unpacking the nature of salesperson persistence to understand its effects on performance. *Industrial Marketing Management, 71*, 171–188.

Chase, K., & Murtha, B. (2019). Selling to barricaded buyers. *Journal of Marketing, 83*(6), 2–20.

Cho, T. S., & Hambrick, D. C. (2006). Attention as the mediator between top management team characteristics and strategic change: The case of airline deregulation. *Organization Science, 17*(4), 453–469.

Christensen, R. K., & Whiting, S. W. (2018). Evaluating inrole and extrarole behaviors across sectors. *Public Personnel Management, 47*(3), 314–334.

Colletti, J. A., & Chonko, L. B. (1997). Change management initiatives: Moving sales organizations from obsolescence to high performance. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 17*(2), 1–30.

Deery, S., Rayton, B., Walsh, J., & Kinnie, N. (2017). The costs of exhibiting organizational citizenship behavior. *Human Resource Management, 56*(6), 1039–1049.

Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*(3), 499–512.

Dixon, A. L., & Schertzer, S. M. B. (2005). Bouncing back: How salesperson optimism and self-efficacy influence attributions and behaviors following failure. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 25*(4), 361–369.

Dixon, A. L., Spiro, R. L., & Jamil, M. (2001). Successful and unsuccessful sales calls: Measuring salesperson attributions and behavioral intentions. *Journal of Management, 65*(3), 64–78.

Dubinsky, A. J., & Skinner, S. J. (2002). Going the extra mile: Antecedents of salespeople's discretionary effort. *Industrial Marketing Management, 31*(7), 589–598.

Eccleschare, W. (2012). Fail fast and fix it. *Market Leader, Q2*, 55.

Fang, E., Palmatier, R. W., & Evans, K. R. (2004). Goal-setting paradoxes? Trade-offs between working hard and working smart: The United States versus China. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 32*(2), 188–202.

Flaherty, K. E., & Pappas, J. M. (2009). Expanding the sales professional's role: A strategic re-orientation? *Industrial Marketing Management, 38*(7), 806–813.

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research, 18*(1), 39–50.

Friend, S. B., Curasi, C. F., Boles, J. S., & Bellenger, D. N. (2014). Why are you really losing sales opportunities? A buyers' perspective on the determinants of key account sales failures. *Industrial Marketing Management, 43*(7), 1124–1135.

Friend, S. B., Ranjan, K. R., & Johnson, J. S. (2019). Fail fast, sell well: The contingent impact of failing fast on salesperson performance. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 1–11.

Fu, F. Q., Richards, K. A., Hughes, D. E., & Jones, E. (2010). Motivating salespeople to sell new products: The relative influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and self-efficacy. *Journal of Marketing, 74*(6), 61–76.

Gohmann, S. F., Guan, J., Barker, R. M., & Faulds, D. J. (2005). Perceptions of sales force automation: Differences between sales force and management. *Industrial Marketing Management, 34*(4), 337–343.

Gonzalez, G. R., Hoffman, K. D., & Ingram, T. N. (2005). Improving relationship selling through failure analysis and recovery efforts: A framework and call to action. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 25*(1), 57–65.

Guenzi, P., Pardo, C., & Georges, L. (2007). Relational selling strategy and key account managers' relational behaviors: An exploratory study. *Industrial Marketing Management, 36*(1), 121–133.

Gustafson, B. M., Pomirleanu, N., & John-Mariadoss, B. (2018). A review of climate and culture research in selling and sales management. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 38*(1), 144–167.

Hu, J., Jiang, K., Mo, S., Chen, H., & Shi, J. (2016). The motivational antecedents and performance consequences of corporate volunteering: When do employees volunteer and when does volunteering help versus harm work performance? *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 137*, 99–111.

Jacobson, R., & Aaker, D. A. (1985). Is market share all that it's cracked up to be? *Journal of Marketing, 49*(4), 11–22.

Jaramillo, F., & Mulki, J. P. (2008). Sales effort: The intertwined roles of the leader, customers, and the salesperson. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 28*(1), 37–51.

Jaramillo, F., Mulki, J. P., & Boles, J. S. (2011). Workplace stressors, job attitude, and job behaviors: Is interpersonal conflict the missing link? *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 31*(3), 339–356.

Jaworski, B. J. (1988). Toward a theory of marketing control: Environmental context, control types, and consequences. *Journal of Marketing, 52*(3), 23–39.

Jaworski, B. J., Stathakopoulos, V., & Krishnan, H. S. (1993). Control combinations in marketing: Conceptual framework and empirical evidence. *Journal of Marketing, 57*(1), 57–69.

John, G., & Weitz, B. (1989). Salesforce compensation: An empirical investigation of factors related to use of salary versus incentive compensation. *Journal of Marketing Research, 26*(1), 1–14.

Johnson, J. S., Fisher, G. J., & Friend, S. B. (2019). Crowdsourcing service innovation creativity: Environmental influences and contingencies. *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice, 27*(3), 251–268.

Johnson, J. S., Friend, S. B., & Horn, B. J. (2014). Levels of analysis and sources of data in sales research: A multilevel-multisource review. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 34*(1), 70–86.

Johnson, J. S., Friend, S. B., Rutherford, B. N., & Hamwi, G. A. (2016). Absolute versus relative sales failure. *Journal of Business Research, 69*(2), 596–603.

Johnson, J. S., & Sohi, R. S. (2014). The curvilinear and conditional effects of product line breadth on salesperson performance, role stress, and job satisfaction. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 42*(1), 71–89.

Johnson, J. S., & Sohi, R. S. (2017). Getting business-to-business salespeople to implement strategies associated with introducing new products and services. *Industrial Marketing Management, 62*(3), 137–149.

Johnston, M. W., Hair, J. F., Boles, J., & Kurtz, D. L. (1989). Why do salespeople fail? *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 9*(3), 53–58.

Johnston, M. W., & Marshall, G. W. (2013). *Sales force management: Leadership, innovation, technology*. New York: Routledge.

Jordan, J., & Kelly, R. (2015). *Companies with a formal sales process generate more revenue.* Harvard Business Review, January.

Jordan, J., & Vazzana, M. (2011). *Cracking the sales management code: The secrets to measuring and managing sales performance.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Jöreskog, K. G., & Yang, F. (2000). *Latent variable scores and their uses. on-line paper.* http://www.ssicentral.com/lisrel/techdocs/lvscores.pdf.

Khanna, R., Guler, I., & Nerkar, A. (2016). Fail often, fail big, and fail fast? Learning from small failures and R&D performance in the pharmaceutical industry. *Academy of Management Journal, 59*(2), 436–459.

Kwak, H., Anderson, R. E., Leigh, T. W., & Bonifield, S. D. (2019). Impact of salesperson macro-adaptive selling strategy on job performance and satisfaction. *Journal of Business Research, 94*(1), 42–55.

Lehman, D. W., Hahn, J., Ramanujam, R., & Alge, B. J. (2011). The dynamics of the performance–risk relationship within a performance period: The moderating role of deadline proximity. *Organization Science, 22*(6), 1613–1630.

MacKenzie, S. B., Podsakoff, P. M., & Ahearne, M. (1998). Some possible antecedents and consequences of in-role and extra-role salesperson performance. *Journal of Marketing, 62*(3), 87–98.

Maula, M. V., Keil, T., & Zahra, S. A. (2013). Top management's attention to discontinuous technological change: Corporate venture capital as an alert mechanism. *Organization Science, 24*(3), 926–947.

Mayberry, R., Boles, J. S., & Donthu, N. (2018). An escalation of commitment perspective on allocation-of-effort decisions in professional selling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 46*(5), 879–894.

Mayo, M., & Mallin, M. L. (2010). The impact of sales failure on attributions made by "resource-challenged" and "resource secure" salespeople. *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice, 18*(3), 233–247.

McGrath, R. G. (2011). Failing by design. *Harvard Business Review, 89*(4), 76–83.

McNichol, T. (2007). A startup's best friend? *Failure. Business, 2.0*(8), 39–41.

Miao, C. F., & Evans, K. R. (2013). The interactive effects of sales control systems on salesperson performance: A job demands–resources perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 41*(1), 73–90.

Mintzberg, H. (1973). *The nature of managerial work.* New York: Harper and Row.
Morgan, A. (2017). Applying the principle of fast fail to the sales process. Retreived from Porter Consulting https://porterconsulting.net/index.php/2017/01/03/applying-principle-fast-fail-sales-process/.
Morris, M. H., LaForge, R. W., & Allen, J. A. (1994). Salesperson failure: Definition, determinants, and outcomes. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 14*(1), 1–15.
Mulki, J. P., Jaramillo, J. F., & Locander, W. B. (2009). Critical role of leadership on ethical climate and salesperson behaviors. *Journal of Business Ethics, 86*(2), 125–141.
Netemeyer, R. G., Maxham, J. G., & Pullig, C. (2005). Conflicts in the work–family interface: Links to job stress, customer service employee performance, and customer purchase intent. *Journal of Marketing, 69*(2), 130–143.
Nunnally, J. C. (1978). *Psychometric theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
Ocasio, W. (1997). Towards an attention-based view of the firm. *Strategic Management Journal, 18*(S1), 187–206.
Ogilvie, J., Rapp, A., Bachrach, D. G., Mullins, R., & Harvey, J. (2017). Do sales and service compete? The impact of multiple psychological climates on frontline employee performance. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 37*(1), 11–26.
Plank, R. E., Reid, D. A., Koppitsch, S. E., & Meyer, J. (2018). The sales manager as a unit of analysis: A review and directions for future research. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 38*(1), 78–91.
Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common methods biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(5), 879–903.
Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2012). Sources of method bias in social science research and recommendations on how to control it. *Annual Review of Psychology, 63*(1), 539–569.
Powers, T. L., Jennings, J. A. C., & DeCarlo, T. E. (2014). An assessment of needed sales management skills. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 34*(3), 206–222.
Rapp, A., Ahearne, M., Mathieu, J., & Schillewaert, N. (2006). The impact of knowledge and empowerment on working smart and working hard: The moderating role of experience. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 23*(3), 279–293.
Rindfleisch, A., Malter, A. J., Ganesan, S., & Moorman, C. (2008). Cross-sectional versus longitudinal survey research: Concepts, findings, and guidelines. *Journal of Marketing Research, 45*(3), 261–279.
Rust, R. T., Moorman, C., & Dickson, P. R. (2002). Getting return on quality: Revenue expansion, cost reduction, or both? *Journal of Marketing, 66*(4), 7–24.
Sabatino, M. (2016). Economic crisis and resilience: Resilient capacity and competitiveness of the enterprises. *Journal of Business Research, 69*(5), 1924–1927.
Schumacker, R. E. (2002). Latent variable interaction modeling. *Structural Equation Modeling, 9*(1), 40–54.
Serviere-Munoz, L., & Mallin, M. L. (2013). How do unethical salespeople sleep at night? The role of neutralizations in the justification of unethical sales intentions. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 33*(3), 289–306.
Shanock, L. R., & Eisenberger, R. (2006). When supervisors feel supported: Relationships with subordinates' perceived supervisor support, perceived organizational support, and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*(3), 689–695.
Silver, L. S., Dwyer, S., & Alford, B. (2006). Learning and performance goal orientation of salespeople revisited: The role of performance-approach and performance-avoidance orientations. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 26*(1), 27–38.
Simon, H. A., & Barnard, C. I. (1947). *Administrative behavior: A study of decision-making processes in administrative organization*.
Sitkin, S. B. (1992). Learning through failure: The strategy of small losses. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 14*, 231–266.
Skiba, J., Saini, A., & Friend, S. B. (2016). The effect of managerial cost prioritization on sales force turnover. *Journal of Business Research, 69*(12), 5917–5924.
Skiba, J., Saini, A., & Friend, S. B. (2018). Sales manager cost control engagement: Antecedents and performance implications. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management,* 1–15.
Steenburgh, T. J., & Ahearne, M. (2018). How to sell new products. *Harvard Business Review* (November-December 92-101).
Stevens, R., Moray, N., Bruneel, J., & Clarysse, B. (2015). Attention allocation to multiple goals: The case of for-profit social enterprises. *Strategic Management Journal, 36*(7), 1006–1016.
Sujan, H. (1986). Smarter versus harder: An exploratory attributional analysis of salespeople's motivation. *Journal of Marketing Research, 23*(1), 41–49.
Sujan, H., Sujan, M., & Bettman, J. R. (1988). Knowledge structure differences between more effective and less effective salespeople. *Journal of Marketing Research, 25*(1), 81–86.
Sujan, H., Weitz, B. A., & Kumar, N. (1994). Learning orientation, working smart, and effective selling. *Journal of Marketing, 58*(3), 39–52.
Sujan, H., Weitz, B. A., & Sujan, M. (1988). Increasing sales productivity by getting salespeople to work smarter. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 8*(2), 9–19.
Van Doorn, S., Jansen, J. J., Van den Bosch, F. A., & Volberda, H. W. (2013). Entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance: Drawing attention to the senior team. *Journal of Product Innovation Management, 30*(5), 821–836.
Vroom, V. H. (1964). *Work and motivation.* New York: Wiley.
Vukotich, G. (2015). *Why failing fast is good for business.* (Chief Learning Officer).
Washburn, M., & Bromiley, P. (2012). Comparing aspiration models: The role of selective attention. *Journal of Management Studies, 49*(5), 896–917.
White, R. D. (2010). The micromanagement disease: Symptoms, diagnosis, and cure. *Public Personnel Management, 39*(1), 71–76.
Wu, F., & Cavusgil, S. T. (2006). Organizational learning, commitment, and joint value creation in interfirm relationships. *Journal of Business Research, 59*(1), 81–89.
Yadav, M. S., Prabhu, J. C., & Chandy, R. K. (2007). Managing the future: CEO attention and innovation outcomes. *Journal of Marketing, 71*(4), 84–101.
Ye, J., Marinova, D., & Singh, J. (2012). Bottom-up learning in marketing frontlines: Conceptualization, processes, and consequences. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 40*(6), 821–844.