



*An Empirical Investigation Of Perceptions Of The
Sales Profession In A Developing Economy:
A Survey Of Turkish Business Students*

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Peer Reviewed

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ABSTRACT

As the global economy moves more and more toward being service driven, the demand for sales professionals will also increase. Successful recruitment of marketing graduates may depend in part on their perceptions of sales as a career option.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Turkish business students regarding the sales profession. A self-administered questionnaire was used in this study to gather data from 443 Turkish business students. The results provide a view of students' perceptions of sales as a professional career. Factor analysis using a varimax rotation was done to examine the structure of the sales related statements by producing a subset of variables related to the perceptions of sales as a profession.

Results of the study indicate that perceptions regarding a sales profession vary based on the educational background (courses taken, student majors, etc.) as well as some demographics like work status.

Findings suggest that educators might be able to help change the negative image of a sales career by re-evaluating their approaches in teaching sales related courses in addition to correcting the misperceptions of students regarding the sales career. As the academic community works to reposition the perceptions of sales careers among college students, it might also have a spillover effect on those already working in this profession. As a result of these types of changes, business professionals, especially in the growing service sector, might see an improvement in their ability to recruit and retain more qualified sales people. Overall, the results of this study indicate that the sales profession might benefit from re-positioning.

INTRODUCTION

Because of the integral role of salespeople in the generation of sales for an organization, the sales function is vitally important for the success of business firms. Hence, the recruitment and hiring of quality applicants is quite important in terms of the functionality of sales departments within business firms. One important source for recruiting salespersons is on college and university campuses.

Selling is one of the most frequently chosen professions by students who pursue a marketing degree. Some graduates who begin their careers in sales often find it to be a stepping stone to future career opportunities in marketing. For some students', however, sales becomes their professional career.

As society continues to move more and more toward a service oriented economy, the demand for sales professionals will continue to increase. Prior research, (i.e. Dubinsky 1981) suggests that in spite of the fact that college campuses are a good source for recruiting sales people, the competition with other career recruiters, (such as accounting, management, etc.) turns the hiring of the best and brightest prospects into a tough competitive task. Successfully recruiting marketing graduates may depend on students' perceptions of sales as professional career.

In spite of the dynamic nature of the sales profession, there continue to be negative stereotypes. While some people perceive selling to be a vital function that helps organizations survive in highly competitive industries, it is sometimes viewed by others (in business and academe) as one that is fair game for deriding comments regarding what they do and the value they add to an organization.

The prevailing negative attitudes toward sales as a profession can be traced back to the 1930s, when sales forces became an integral part of doing business. Thomas J. Watson, then president of IBM, started an initiative to change and upgrade the public image of this profession. One of the ways Watson did this was to form the Sales Executives Club of New York. The purpose was to help change the negative public image of salespeople over time (Chasin 1987).

Keeping in mind that a positive or negative perception towards any career potentially impacts the quality of the people who are attracted to a profession, our study examined college students' (undergraduate and graduate) perceptions of what has sometimes been referred to as a "controversial" profession, sales. An example of prior research that supports the idea of sales being a "controversial" career is Mathews and Redman (2001). They stress that "for a variety of reasons, turnover in sales staff has typically been higher than in many other employee groups." A spring 2005 study by Sibson Consulting (www.sibson.com, Spring 2005) on 65 leading sales organizations revealed that the annual sales force turnover rate for last two years was 12 percent. Considering that the sales force turnover rate is industry sensitive, Sibson's survey indicates that voluntary turnover rates are expected to rise for the telecommunications industry, financial services and insurance industries as well as manufacturing (respectively 37 percent, 15 percent and 25 percent). If a profession has high employee turnover rates, it merits further investigation to try to determine conceptually and empirically the role of how attractive the profession is plays in determining the rate turnover in the profession.

In spite of its high rate of turnover, due to the rapid escalation of service industries and the competition among many businesses for qualified employees, the importance of sales related jobs continues to increase. For most businesses, the sales force is a vital component in business success. In many situations, they are the "front line" of an offensive strategy to generate cash flow. In this regard, talented sales people are a sine-qua-non for businesses.

From the business community's perspective, one might argue that there is a relatively positive attitude towards sales and sales related jobs. A large number of CEOs had sales positions earlier in their careers. However, the business community and students have a high potential of having different perceptions and expectations regarding, not only sales jobs, but also the other marketing career alternatives.

The purpose of our study is to examine business student's perceptions of sales as a professional career. This study addresses these perceptions in a developing economy, Turkey. Based on anecdotal evidence (although not empirically proven) the percent of undergraduate students who are interested in pursuing a sales career is relatively low compared to many other marketing careers. This study empirically tests the perception of sales profession by surveying business students attending three different universities in Turkey. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this represents an initial effort in this area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to (Mason 1965), understanding the perceptions of sales as a low prestige occupation is important to businesses for two reasons: First, a negative perception can and often does lead to recruitment problems for businesses. Secondly, it may influence job satisfaction levels of current salespeople. Low job satisfaction levels contribute in part to the stressful nature of the sales profession. Dubinsky (1981), in one of the important studies on sales careers, categorizes three reasons for student negativism towards sales careers as being:

- 1) the negative salesperson stereotype prevails in mass media
- 2) personal negative experiences of students with salespeople
- 3) general low status nature of sales jobs perceived by people in general

Castleberry (1990), focused on another perspective of the sales profession. He identified twelve factors (recognition, sense of achievement, advancement, status, pay, supervision, job itself, job security, coworkers, personal development, fringe benefits, and working conditions) that motivate students to pursue a sales career. The time frame examined was “now” and then “10 years from now”. Students were asked to rank these twelve factors in terms of “today” and “ten years from now”. The job itself and pay were the two consecutively highest ranked choices for both the “now” and “10 years from now” evaluations. The very existence of a “job itself” item along with a “pay” factor in the highest ranking category indicates that there are some things that should be investigated regarding the appeal of the sales profession by students other than financial reasons. While potential earnings are understandable in our harsh economic environment, “job itself” as a motivational factor leads to other areas to be investigated regarding perceptions of this profession by students.

In the sales literature, there are numerous studies with a variety of perspectives focusing on student perceptions regarding a sales career. Dubinsky (1981: 353) emphasized a weakness of sales perception studies, stating that “these studies generally conclude that students are negatively predisposed toward selling and that they have misconceptions about sales. But the question arises: Students have misconceptions about selling in relation to what? Invariably, the answer is in relation to the subjective impressions of the *authors* writing the articles (!) – many of whom have little or no field sales experience.” The criticism of Dubinsky still holds true. Questions like what the point of reference is for these perceptions, who has the more positive or negative attitude than whom, etc., lead to comparative and, more importantly, longitudinal approaches to sales perception research.

This study helps to set a comparison point for future longitudinal studies in Turkey. A longitudinal approach was used by Swenson, Swinyard, Langrehr and Smith (1993), who replicated a previous study on a business student sample from the same universities and colleges that were used in an earlier study. Interestingly, the results indicated a decline among the respondents in the appeal of entry-level marketing positions, including personal selling. Also, this study revealed a negative relationship between the academic performance (grade point average) of students

and the appeal of a sales career (e.g., those with higher GPA's would be less likely to view a sales career in a positive light).

Cook and Hartman (1986) focused on the rarity of women in sales related jobs and examined the attitudes of females towards sales jobs in an effort to determine what might be the cause of their reluctance. Based on a sample of 300 undergraduate business students, Muehling and Weeks (1988) found that females had a more favorable attitude toward personal selling than did males. More than a decade later, Cook (1998) examined the gender role in the assessment of characteristics related to a sales career on a convenience sample of 85 business students. Although there were some significant differences in compensation, supervision, recognition, and challenge issues, Cook found that a sales career was perceived relatively the same by males and females. Additionally, Sohail and Bradmore (2003) conducted a study of the perceptions of sales careers using a sample of 210 Australian students and found that gender did not affect the perceptions.

DelVecchio and Honeycutt Jr. (2000) investigated the perceptions of sales as a career based on ethnicity. Their results indicated that African-American students held some of the same perceptions as did other students. In other words, for most sales related career options they found no difference based on a racial evaluation. In a follow up study on this topic, Delvecchio and Honeycutt, Jr (2002) examined the role of race in evaluating sales jobs. They studied three job attributes (starting salary, autonomy, and education) considered when rating sales career opportunities. Findings of this study indicated that racial group membership was not important when rating sales career opportunities. In a recent race based study undertaken by Sohail (2004), the results indicated that the ethnicity of respondents has no effect on the preference for sales careers as compared to others.

Patton (2000) examined the perceptions of the sales profession of Australian and South Asian students and found significant differences in jobs characteristics by country of origin, major, year, etc. For instance, Indonesians showed significantly stronger agreement with the notion that a sales career provided career growth opportunities. On the other hand, they were significantly more pessimistic about promotion opportunities. These findings might suggest the importance of cultural backgrounds and how the sales profession is perceived in a particular culture. In another cross-cultural study, Honeycutt, Jr., Ford, Swenson and Swinyard (1999), compared the perceptions of sales careers among business students from United States, New Zealand, and the Philippines. Their findings indicated some negative descriptions of sales as a profession by respondents from all three countries. Studies regarding students' perception of a sales career have not been undertaken in a developing economy such as Turkey.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the general perceptions of Turkish business students towards the sales profession. Turkey was chosen for this study for several important reasons. First, although it is hard to generalize, many firms in Turkey are just now beginning to embrace the marketing concept and let go of the sales concept. In this regard, business practices in Turkey are lagging somewhat behind more developed economies such as the United States. This especially holds true regarding marketing practices in Turkey. Only recently have mid- to large-sized businesses begun to apply marketing practices. Until recently, marketing was thought

of as being synonymous with sales. Even the separation of the terms marketing and sales is causing another problem: the degrading of sales in Turkey. Secondly, considering the lack of studies on the perceptions of students about sales careers, such a study might shed light on this conceptual and applied transition. Thirdly, a self reference criterion primarily based on American standards stating that sales has a positive perception within most of the business community would cause a failure to detect cultural, economical and/or any other factor related differences in other countries. And finally, it could as serve as a benchmark for future longitudinal studies on this topic.

Based on existing literature and the objectives stated above, several research questions were formulated:

1. Does gender impact students' perceptions of the sales profession?
2. Do students who have taken a sales related course have significantly different perceptions of sales as a career than those who have not taken a sales related course?
3. Do students who are working have significantly different perceptions of sales as a career than those who are not working?
4. Do students who have taken marketing courses have significantly different perceptions of sales as a career than those who have not taken marketing courses?

METHODOLOGY

Survey Instrument and Procedures

A questionnaire consisting of 21 items related to the sales profession was used for gathering data from Turkish business students. It consisted of two main sections, the first section was related to perceptions of sales as a profession, and the second part captured demographic characteristics of the respondents. The sample included both undergraduate and graduate students. As a t-test is sensitive to equal sample sizes, and there was a dramatic difference in sample sizes of both these groups, no further analysis was engaged in to compare the undergraduate students with graduate students.

To increase the diversity of the sample, the sampling frame included three of the leading universities in Istanbul, Turkey. One of these universities is ranked first and the other is ranked fourth in terms of enrollment. The third university was a technical university which included a business department as well. In theory, although there is no difference between technical universities and other universities in Turkey, technical universities have limited social science departments relative to the other, regular universities. Other than this, the curriculum is similar to that of the regular universities in Turkey. Assuming that the profiles or backgrounds of students enrolled at technical universities might differ slightly from the other students, we have added this more technically oriented student group into the sample. In this regard, the sample represented a diverse group of students with respect to both demographics and sociological traits which enabled us to decrease the non-response error stemming mostly from the nature of convenience sampling in many cases. The

questionnaires were distributed during class hours by colleagues from these universities. The number of questionnaires returned from these three universities was roughly the same. Voluntary participation was encouraged and no incentive was provided such as extra grades, etc.

The questionnaire used was based upon the work of Amin, Hayajneh, and Nwakanma (1995). Because it was originally developed in English, it was translated into Turkish and then translated back into English. Two of the authors carefully reviewed the survey after it was translated and made minor corrections considering the conceptual equivalence of the scale. Also, the scale was evaluated by a Turkish colleague working on sales management issues for face validity concerns. This review determined that face validity was present in the instrument.

It was a self administered questionnaire. The questionnaire included nominal, interval (Likert) and ratio scales. The Likert scale used was scored from one to five where (1= strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). Demographic questions included gender, age, marital status, employment status, major field of study, courses taken. Nominal and ratio scales were used in the demographic section.

The questionnaire was distributed to students during regular class periods. Students enrolled in a variety of business courses were included (except for sales management). Only those taking a sales management course during the data collection time were excluded to avoid the possibility of introducing bias into the sample. A brief statement regarding anonymity of respondents was included with the introduction by the sponsors of this research. Students were also told that neither participation nor non-participation would have an impact on their grade. A total of 443 questionnaires were completed.

Sample Characteristics

In total, 466 surveys were distributed. The number of usable surveys completed was 443, yielding a overall response rate of approximately 95 percent. There were 346 undergraduate respondents and 97 graduate respondents. Forty seven percent of the respondents were female and 53 percent were male.

Table 1 (below) provides a complete respondent profile. Those who responded were determined to be qualified to respond to questions concerning sales as a career choice based on their university standing, age, work experience and field of study. Of the total respondents, 67.5 percent were between the ages 22-24. Typically, university students in this age range are at the point of giving their career choices serious thought. Those respondents age 25 and above represented 13.7 percent of the sample. Only 18.2 percent were 21 and under.

TABLE 1
Respondent Profile

Characteristic:	Frequency	Percent*
Age:		
21 and below	81	18.2
22	165	37.3
23	87	19.6
24	47	10.6
25	24	5.4
Above 25	37	8.3
Gender:		
Female	207	46.7
Male	236	53.3
Marital status:		
Single	429	96.8
Married	13	2.9
Divorced	1	0.2
Work Status:		
Working	128	28.9
Not working	315	71.1
Work experience (years):		
1 year	54	41.9
2 years	26	20.2
3 years	16	12.4
4 years	15	11.6
>4 years	18	13.7
Employment Status:		
Full time	74	56.1
Part time	58	43.9
Field of Study:		
Marketing	161	63.4
Others	93	36.6
	*254	
Marketing Course Taken:		
Yes	425	97.0
No	13	3.0
Sales Course Taken:		
Yes	256	58.7
No	180	41.3
Education:		
Undergraduate	346	78.1
Graduate	97	21.9

* Note: These represent the respondents from universities having this specialization; therefore the sum does not include the entire 443 responses.

**Percentages calculated based on totals in each characteristic.

In an effort to gain further insight into their perspectives, respondents were asked about their work status. Although there were some respondents who had experience beyond the average of four years, the average percentage was between one to four years. Over half (62.1 percent) had worked one to two years. Those who had worked three to four years accounted for 24 percent of the total respondents. Those who had worked over four years accounted for 13.7% of the total respondents. At the time of the study, of the working respondents, fifty six percent worked full time and forty-four percent worked part time.

In addition to the respondents work history and given the nature of the study, it was also important to know the composition of the sample regarding their field of study. The results showed that 63.4 percent were marketing majors, and 58.7 percent had taken a sales course of some type before (not during the data collection period).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assessment of Validity and Reliability

Content Validity - The scale used in this study had been used in previous research appearing in the sales literature and was found to be valid and reliable to measure the constructs of interest. Specifically, the measure was used in the same context as this study, measuring business students perceptions of sales as a career option. The distinction between earlier studies and this one is that (to the knowledge of the authors) this topic has not been studied in a developing economy such as Turkey.

Prior to being used in this study, the survey was reviewed by several business faculty in an effort to determine its content validity. Based on their evaluations, the authors determined that the instrument was an adequate representation of the construct of interest (perceptions of sales as a career).

Reliability Assessment - Reliability of the scale was assessed using coefficient alpha. The item to total correlation of the scale was ($\alpha = .7774$, $p=0.05$), and the coefficient alpha was determined to be acceptable according to (Nunnally 1979). None of the 21 items on the scale were discarded.

All of the survey items were subjected to a factor analysis to examine the potential structure of the various attributes that were used to examine student perceptions of the sales profession. First, to determine the sampling adequacy for using factor analysis, KMO was used, and the result was 0.817, which is meritorious for conducting factor analysis (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black 1998). The significance of Bartlett's test of sphericity was 0.00, which is also acceptable for conducting factor analysis.

Principal components analysis (PCA) using a varimax rotation was determined to be appropriate given that the analysis was exploratory and the objective was to explain as much variance as possible. The results yielded a six-factor solution

(See Table 2 below) covering job characteristics, personality, empathy, demanding working conditions, societal concerns, and work/travel time. The two strongest factors were job characteristics (seven items) and personality (six items).

Table 2
Factor Analysis

Rotated Component Matrix	Job characteristics	Personality	Empathy	Working Time	Societal Concerns	Demanding Working Conditions
Salesmen are professionals	.634					
Pays Well	.643					
Salesmen are super achievers	.681					
Attracts people who are well educated	.589					
Attracts people who are like me	.497					
High status	.650					
Attracts people who are upper-class	.481					
Attracts people who are persistent		.486				
Attracts people who are friendly		.646				
Attracts people who are exciting		.530				
Attracts people who are youthful		.451				
Attracts people who are secure		.533				
Attracts people who are relaxed		.601				
Attracts people who are understandable			.698			
Attracts people who are responsible			.517			
Attracts people who are courteous			.725			
Takes a minimum amount of time each week				.764		
Requires little traveling				.687		
Benefits society					.792	
Attracts people who are masculine in most cases						.519
Does not require weekend work all of the time						.790

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a Rotation converged in 8 iterations. Only those attributes with acceptable loading (e.g. .40 or higher are shown in the table above).

An analysis of each factor in relationship to the six different groups of students (marketing students/other students; working students/not working students; students with sales course/students without sales course) is presented in Table 3 (below). This indicates where there are significant differences between each group based upon specific factors. The following discussion provides a detailed account of those areas where the differences among groups were significant.

TABLE 3

Classification of Significant Differences Among Factors

Factors	Attitude Measures (1)	Marketing/ Other Students (2)	Working/ Not Working (3)	Sales Course/ No Sales Course (4)
1 Job Characteristics	Salesmen are professionals	+		+
	Pays Well			+
	Salesmen are super achievers			
	Attracts people who are well educated			
	Attracts people who are like me	+		+
	High status		+	
	Attracts people who are upper-class			
2 Personality	Attracts people who are persistent			
	Attracts people who are friendly		+	
	Attracts people who are exciting		+	+
	Attracts people who are youthful		+	
	Attracts people who are secure	+		
	Attracts people who are relaxed			
3 Empathy	Attracts people who are understandable			
	Attracts people who are responsible	+		
	Attracts people who are courteous			
4 Work/travel Time	Takes a minimum amount of time each week	+		+
	Requires little traveling		+	
5 Societal Concerns	Benefits society			
6 Demanding Working Conditions	Attracts people who are masculine in most cases			
	Does not require weekend work all of the time			

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the respondents' level of agreement/disagreement with the twenty one items used to measure perceptions of sales as a career choice. The following discussion addresses only those items that were ranked as the top ten attributes according to their mean values. The values of all of the items are summarized in Table 4 (below).

Of the twenty one questions used to assess perceptions of sales professionals, approximately 75 percent of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that a sales career attracts people who are secure (self-confident, mean = 3.92 sd=.97). Following the perception that "those who are attracted to the sales profession are secure" was the attribute persistence. Approximately 16 percent of those responding to this question strongly agreed and 53 percent agreed that persistence was a key quality in those who are attracted to a sales career (mean=3.67, sd=.99). The third attribute that the respondents either strongly agreed (11.3 percent) or agreed (56.7 percent) with was that sales careers attract those who are friendly (mean=3.67, sd=.84). The respondents in this study felt more strongly about the attribute of persistence than that of being friendly. This perception might be explained by the sales literature which suggests that repeated sales calls are needed before a sale might be made.

In addition to the attributes (personality traits) discussed above, the respondents also perceived that the sales profession attracts individuals who are relaxed (13.8 percent strongly agreed and 47.9 percent agreed, (mean=3.54, sd=1.02), and who are exciting (10.8 percent strongly agreed and 47.2 percent agreed, (mean=3.53, sd=.90). Finally, student's views indicate that they perceive the profession as attracting people who are youthful (15.3 percent strongly agreed, 37.5 percent agreed, mean=3.46, sd=1.04) and responsible (mean=3.39, sd=0.93). They also expressed agreement with the statement that "sales jobs benefit society" (mean=3.45, sd=0.89).

In summary, each of the attributes that students expressed the strongest agreement with regarding sales as a career were linked more with personality traits rather than with skill sets, education, gender, and/or social class. This suggests that, according to their perceptions, those who choose a sales career possess certain personality qualities that lend themselves to being successful in a sales career. These are inherent qualities. This means that the required technical/learned skills sets are perceived as being secondary to success in this profession. This knowledge might be helpful to those who teach sales classes. Knowing that students perceive personality traits as being more strongly indicative of success in a sales career could cause more emphasis to be placed on the importance of strong skill sets (not just personality) as a key to success.

TABLE 4**Descriptive Statistics Regarding Student's Views of Sales Profession***

Rank	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Standard Deviation	Mean
1	Attracts people who are secure	28.2	46.7	14.9	7.4	2.3	.97	3.92
2	Attracts people who are persistent	15.8	53.0	16.3	10.8	3.6	.99	3.67
3	Attracts people who are friendly	11.3	56.7	21.4	9.3	1.4	.84	3.67
4	Pays Well	15.1	43.3	30.7	8.8	.7	.87	3.64
5	Salesmen are professionals	15.6	37.5	33.2	12.0	1.6	.95	3.54
6	Attracts people who are relaxed	13.8	47.9	19.2	15.3	3.4	1.02	3.54
7	Attracts people who are exciting	10.8	47.2	27.1	12.6	1.6	.90	3.53
8	Attracts people who are youthful	15.3	37.5	25.7	16.9	2.9	1.04	3.46
9	Benefits society	9.0	41.5	37.2	8.1	3.4	.89	3.45
10	Attracts people who are responsible	9.0	41.8	30.0	17.6	1.6	.93	3.39
11	Attracts people who are understandable	9.9	38.4	32.5	14.9	3.2	.96	3.37
12	Does not require weekend work all of the time	7.4	41.1	26.4	18.3	5.6	1.03	3.27
13	Attracts people who are well educated	5.4	29.6	37.9	23.9	3.2	.93	3.10
14	Attracts people who are like me	10.8	31.6	23.0	21.2	13.1	1.22	3.06
15	Salesmen are super achievers	6.1	20.1	46.5	23.9	2.5	.89	3.03
16	Attracts people who are courteous	5.9	27.3	30.0	28.2	7.7	1.05	2.95
17	High status	3.2	21.2	41.8	27.1	5.9	.92	2.89
18	Attracts people who are masculine in most cases	3.8	17.6	29.1	35.4	13.8	1.05	2.62
19	Attracts people who are upper-class	2.0	9.9	34.8	42.9	9.3	.87	2.52
20	Takes a minimum amount of time each week	2.5	6.5	19.9	46.6	23.9	.95	2.17
21	Requires little traveling	1.4	5.6	15.6	44.5	32.3	.91	1.99

* Percentages do not include missing values. ** Percentages are sorted in descending order.

Discussion of Research Questions

Based upon previous research regarding perceptions of sales careers and the objectives of this study, several research questions were formulated. To examine the relationships specified in these questions, a series of t-test were conducted based on four different comparison levels: "male versus female", "marketing versus non-marketing students", "students having taken a sales course versus those who had not taken a sales course" and "working versus non-working students". The following discussion addresses the results of the questions that were tested and found to be most significant among these groups.

RQ1: Does gender significantly impact students' perceptions of the sales profession?

There were statistically significant differences between male and female respondents on four attributes: High Achievers, Masculine, Well Educated, and Well Paying. Each of these were significant at $p=0.05$. These are summarized in Table 5 (below). Male students perceived sales people as being "high achievers" more so than did females. Although a statistically significant difference was found between male and female students in their perception of sales being more masculine than feminine, their mean values were quite similar. This might suggest that both male and female students view sales as a masculine oriented profession. This finding is consistent with previous research related to gender specificity and sales careers (Cook and Hartman 1986; Cook 1998). The third area where a statistically significant difference was found based on gender was education. Male students had a stronger perception than did females that sales jobs attract people who are highly educated. Finally, when asked whether they considered sales people to be high achievers, male students more strongly agreed with this view than the female students. In summary, with the possible exception of masculinity, these findings suggest that male students have more strongly held perceptions of the sales profession with respect to these five attributes than do female students. One explanation might be cultural perceptions regarding the roles of males and female in this society. Except for these few attributes, the data suggest that gender does not play a significant role in describing the students' perceptions of a sales career.

TABLE 5

Mean Differences of Male versus Female Perceptions of Sales Career*

Statement	Male		Female		T value	df	p
	mean	sd	mean	Sd			
High Acheiver	3.12	0.95	2.96	0.83	2.507	440	0.013
Masculine	2.83	1.11	2.44	0.95	3.998	440	0.000
Well Educated	3.21	0.97	3.01	0.95	2.254	441	0.025
Well Paying	3.74	0.85	3.56	0.88	2.193	435	0.029

*Includes only the statistically significant results.

RQ2: Do students who have taken a sales course have significantly different perceptions of sales as a career than those who have not taken a sales course?

As can be seen in Table 6 (below), there were statistically significant differences in students' perceptions on 5 of the 21 items on the survey based upon whether they had or had not taken a sales related course. These items were: Professional, Well Paying, Exciting, Like Me, and Minimum Amount of Time Spent each Week. Each of these was significant at $p=0.05$ level. The items are linked to factors one (job characteristics), two (personality), and four (Work/Travel Time), which are summarized in Table 2 and Table 3 (above).

As would be expected, in each of these areas, it is clear that in this study that students having been exposed to the opportunities offered by sales careers via course work does have an impact upon students' perceptions of this as a viable career option. Those who had taken a sales course more strongly agreed with each of these five items than those who had not. One interesting point relates to the item "time spent" or hours worked, responses were similar among those who had taken a sales course and those who had not. This suggests that whether they had taken a sales course or not affected respondents' perception that sales careers require a significant time investment. Another area of difference was whether respondents saw a sales professional as someone like themselves or not. Those who had taken a sales course could more easily perceive themselves in that role than could those who had not. This reinforces the idea that education does have an important role to play in helping meet the demand for qualified sales professionals, especially in developing economies such as Turkey.

TABLE 6

Mean Differences Based on Having Taken Sales Courses*

Statement	Sales Course		No Sales Course		T value	df	p
	mean	sd	Mean	Sd			
Professional	3.64	0.98	3.41	0.87	2.445	433	0.015
Well paying	3.73	0.89	3.50	0.82	2.682	429	0.008
Exciting	3.63	0.89	3.42	0.92	2.403	431	0.017
Like me	3.17	1.20	2.89	1.23	2.352	433	0.019
Minimum	2.07	1.00	2.30	0.87	-2.423	429	0.016

*Includes only the statistically significant results

RQ3: Do students who are working versus those who are not working have significantly different perceptions of sales as a career?

The results of this study indicate significant that perceptual differences exist between working and nonworking students on five attributes: Friendly, Exciting, Youthful, High Status, and Travel Time. These attributes are linked to two factors: (job characteristics) and (personality) which are summarized in Table 2 and Table 3 (above). Of these two, the more significant perceptual differences between working and nonworking students were linked to the factor, personality. Students who were working more strongly agreed with the attributes of sales professionals being youthful, friendly, and exciting as characteristics of a sales professional. This suggests that the perception of the personality characteristics of salespeople may be influenced by whether a student is in the workforce or not.

Working students perceived sales careers as being more "high status" than did those who were not working. When asked about whether "sales careers require little travel time" as a part of a sales career, those who were working more strongly disagreed than did those who were not working.

Working and nonworking students had similar levels of agreement regarding those items related to the personality traits of sales professionals. However, their perceptions related to items associated with job characteristics, indicated there is a

marked differences between the two groups. This would suggest that those who are working might have a better grasp of these specific aspects of a sales career due to their practical experience. Perhaps academic curriculums could be adjusted to emphasize more strongly what the job characteristics might be in order to attempt to avoid stereotyping the sales profession. (See Table 7 below.)

TABLE 7

Mean Differences of the Perceptions of Working and Non-Working Students*

Statement	Working		Not Working		T value	df	p
	mean	sd	mean	Sd			
Friendly	3.81	0.89	3.62	0.82	2.230	441	0.026
Exciting	3.68	0.92	3.48	0.89	2.121	438	0.034
Youthful	3.68	1.03	3.37	1.03	2.853	434	0.005
High Status	3.07	0.96	2.81	0.89	2.706	437	0.007
Travel	1.83	0.84	2.05	0.94	-2.272	437	0.024

*Includes only the statistically significant results

RQ4: Do students who are marketing majors and those who are non-marketing majors have significantly different perceptions of sales as a career?

The results indicated significant perceptual differences between marketing and non-marketing students on five attributes. These attributes are also linked to four factors: factor one, (job characteristics); factor two, (personality); factor three, (empathy); and factor four (work/travel time). As would be expected given their academic interests and exposure, marketing majors more strongly agreed with each of these statements than did non-marketing majors. Marketing majors perceived sales professionals as being “like me” and “strong and confident”. This again speaks to their interests and educational background. Specific knowledge of sales careers can aid in dispelling the “myths” of sales careers and perhaps contribute to growth in the pool of students pursuing these careers. (See Table 8 below.)

TABLE 8

Mean Differences of Marketing Students Perceptions and Non-Marketing Students*

Statement	Marketing Students		Non-Marketing		T value	df	P
	mean	sd	mean	Sd			
Professional	3.75	0.95	3.29	0.80	3.943	252	0.000
Responsible	3.55	0.90	3.16	0.96	3.259	252	0.001
Secure	4.06	0.92	3.76	0.95	2.468	250	0.014
Like me	3.24	1.22	2.73	1.20	3.193	252	0.002
Minimum	2.03	0.89	2.42	1.08	-2.904	160.165	0.004

*Includes only the statistically significant results.

CONCLUSION

These findings suggest that there are issues that those who are recruiting college students into sales positions may find useful. To hire the best person(s), companies need to be aware of how students view their positions as opposed to other career choices. This study revealed that there are definite significant differences among the various groups studied (i.e. working/nonworking, marketing/non-marketing, gender, and sales courses taken or not taken) that might be important to address. One area that the results indicated there are significant differences in perceptions between groups was related to the amount of time a sales person spends traveling and working. Another was regarding the perceptions of personality traits that were seen as being typical versus the importance of certain skill sets in a sales position.

One of the most important aspects of this study is the different perceptions revealed regarding almost all of the variables of personality traits. Interestingly, different groups perceive different variables differently. One example of this finding is reflected in the responses to the question which asked what the characteristics of a salesperson should be. There was not a consensus among the participants on this topic. Another example is when firms may miss hiring qualified candidates because they do not see them as having the right “personality” for the job. The differences exist especially between working and not-working students. Perhaps one way to address the disparity in student views would be to be proactive in inviting more sales professionals to participate in the sales management and personal selling in classroom settings. These types of interactions could help students to see the real life side of this profession.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As it is used in the questionnaire, the term “sales jobs” is broad. This generalization of the concept makes it difficult to understand what type of sales jobs the respondents thought of when they read this phrase. Therefore the perceptions of distinct types of sales jobs (missionary sales jobs, pioneer sales jobs, order taking jobs, etc.) could not be determined and may have created a slight bias in responses based on the individual respondent’s point of reference.

Another limitation of this study is the characteristics of the sample, which consisted of business students only. Considering the recruitment strategies of companies today, which are focused on students coming not only from a business background, but also from many different backgrounds, further research should include other disciplines as well.

A point emphasized in a similar study by Muehling and Weeks (1988) was whether results would change if the respondents were to evaluate the sales profession among a few other (marketing related or not) professions using the same scale, rather than on the sales profession alone. Future studies might incorporate other career options

with the sales career to provide a source of comparison. In other words, how would students perceive sales careers when compared to other career options?

This study could serve as a benchmark for further longitudinal country specific studies. The reasons behind the attitudes found in this study could be the topic of a cross-sectional study. It also might be used in a cross cultural study with more developed economies. In addition, the attitudes of business students and students from other disciplines could be studied in more detail for a deeper understanding of why the gaps in perceptions between groups revealed by this study exist. And lastly, considering the statistically significant differences between working and not working students, a further study focused on working salespersons and business students would also contribute to sales literature.

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Note: The title graphic was designed by Carole E. Scott

