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Designing a Model for Sales Personnel Guidance in Large Shopping Malls: A Qualitative Study in Baghdad Family Mall

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Abstract

The present study aimed to explain the dimensions and components of sales staff “directability” (coachability/trainability) at the Family Mall commercial complex and to provide a paradigmatic model in this field. In terms of objective, this research is applicable, and in terms of methodology, it is qualitative, conducted by the Grounded Theory approach. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 experts, including active salespersons in various departments of the Family Mall complex in Erbil. The data were analyzed by the three-stage process of open, axial, and selective coding via MAXQDA 10 software.

The research findings led to the extraction of a paradigmatic model in which the core phenomenon is “Employee Directability,” with an emphasis on intrinsic motivation and passion. This phenomenon is shaped by causal factors including personality traits, professional competencies, work conscience, and experiential capital. Furthermore, contextual factors such as organizational support, training facilities, and the physical and psychological learning environment, along with intervening factors including specific sales environment challenges and internal organizational processes, influence this trend. In response to these conditions, strategies such as structured training, precise scheduling, and learning-by-doing are adopted, resulting in consequences such as professional and organizational development, promotion of individual efficiency, and the attainment of personal peace in the workplace. The results of this research can serve as a foundation for commercial center managers to enhance human resource productivity by fostering a coachable spirit and optimizing guidance processes.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In modern management paradigms, human capital is recognized as the most vital strategic asset and the primary source of sustainable competitive advantage (Barmaki et al., 2025). Unlike other organizational resources, humans are the only element capable of ensuring organizational dynamism in volatile environments through learning, creativity, and adaptability (Babaeinejad et al., 2025). Consequently, human resource management in recent decades has shifted from traditional control-and-supervision-based approaches toward development-oriented approaches (Gholami Zaradni et al., 2025). In this vein, organizations make significant investments in employee training and empowerment; however, empirical evidence suggests that the effectiveness of such training is not always consistent. The variation in behavioral outcomes following developmental courses has drawn researchers' attention to a key variable rooted in an individual's internal capacity to accept transformation (Ali Nikbakhsh, 2026). Employee "directability" (or coachability) remains a relatively uncommon phenomenon in the workplace, as most companies do not implement this process consciously or formally (Ashley et al., 2024). Directability can be defined as "the use of various techniques to consistently motivate and compel employees to improve current skills, acquire new ones, and reach their maximum potential." Alternatively, it can be stated that directability within the employee performance management process is a form of "on-the-job learning"—a collaborative and interactive process that takes shape during daily interactions between a manager and an employee or among employees themselves. Collectively, directability is a process in which the first individual, acting as a coach, facilitates the learning of the second individual to improve their performance and career success by developing key capabilities such as problem-solving skills, enabling the second individual to subsequently create the necessary conditions for their success independently. Furthermore, directability can also be conducted in a group format (Shabani et al., 2024). The importance of employee directability is doubled in service industries, particularly in the retail sector. In large commercial complexes, sales staff are at the front line of customer interaction, and their behavior directly impacts the brand image and organizational profitability. In these environments, due to rapid shifts in customer tastes and the emergence of new persuasion and sales techniques, there is a constant need for continuous training and behavioral changes. A "directable" salesperson not only refrains from perceiving managerial feedback as personal criticism but also utilizes it as a tool for professional growth. However, designing a directability model in this sector faces numerous challenges, as this concept is heavily influenced by the cultural context and environmental requirements; thus, a single prescription cannot be applied to all societies. Consequently, the fundamental question arises: What are the dimensions of sales staff directability, and how can its model be designed and explained within the Family Mall shopping center?

Theoretical Framework

Employee Directability

Employee directability is a concept within the literature of humanities and organizational management defined as the degree of readiness, willingness, and ability of employees to accept, follow, and implement instructions, guidance, and policies issued by organizational managers and leaders. This characteristic represents the flexibility of employees in the face of change, their openness to new learning, and the extent of their cooperation toward achieving the collective goals of the organization (Abukhait et al., 2023). König et al. (2026), in a study titled "*Selecting Employees Who Protect and Promote the Well-being of Others: A Challenge for Personnel Selection*," found that organizations should include the "promotion of others' well-being" as an explicit criterion in the human resource selection process. The results of this research emphasize that recruiting employees with such ethical and humanistic traits not only transforms the workplace into a safer environment but also lays the groundwork for increased directability and team collaboration; this is because such individuals possess a higher

readiness to align with macro-organizational goals and accept corrective guidance for the collective interest. Middleton et al. (2025) examined the assessment of coachability in the workplace. Utilizing a quantitative approach and psychometric analysis across several statistical samples, they designed and validated a scale for measuring coachability. The results of this study, while confirming the validity of the designed instrument, demonstrated that coachability plays a key role in increasing employee readiness to receive feedback and improving their professional development process within the organization.

Methodology

The present study, relying on an interpretive paradigm and a qualitative approach, adopted the “Grounded Theory” strategy to explain the process and analyze the directability model of sales staff within the context of large commercial complexes. The statistical population included active salespeople in various departments of the Family Mall shopping center in Erbil. Sampling was conducted by purposive and theoretical methods, continuing with 20 participants until theoretical saturation was reached. Data were collected through semi-structured and in-depth interviews to accurately extract the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Data analysis was performed based on the three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. In the open coding stage, primary concepts were extracted; in the axial stage, categories were organized into causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences; and in the selective stage, the final model of sales staff directability was formulated. To increase the accuracy and systematic nature of the analysis, MAXQDA 10 software was utilized.

Research Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that employee directability at the Family Mall complex is a multi-dimensional model originating from “intrinsic motivation and passion” as its core category, which is directly influenced by individual competencies and organizational support. The results indicate that by employing structured training strategies and managing environmental challenges, employees’ mental readiness can be transformed into “operational efficiency” and “professional development.”

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this research indicated that specialized competencies are fundamental factors in the directability of sales staff. This implies that the more job knowledge, practical skills, and mastery an individual has over sales tasks, the greater their acceptance of guidance and implementation of managerial recommendations. This finding is aligned with the results of Ali Nikbakhsh (2026). The results showed that experiential capital plays a significant role in increasing the directability of sales staff; this finding is comparable to the results of Babaeinejad et al. (2025). Furthermore, the findings revealed that acceptance of change and flexibility are important components of individual traits in sales staff directability. In large commercial environments where conditions are constantly changing, employees who can adapt themselves to new policies, diverse customers, and fresh requirements are more successful. This result is consistent with the research of Sani et al. (2023). The study also found that discipline and detail-oriented precision are key characteristics of employees with higher directability. Individuals who are organized, precise, and responsible can better execute instructions and are less prone to error. This finding is aligned with the results of Abukhait et al. (2023). Additionally, the findings indicated that innovation and practical creativity are important factors in employee directability, a result consistent with the findings of Abukhait et al. (2023). The research results further demonstrated that communication and interpersonal skills are among the most vital elements of individual traits in the directability of sales staff. Employees who possess the ability for effective dialogue, empathy, active listening, and respectful interaction can better receive and implement managerial messages. This finding is in line with the results of Middleton et al. (2024). At the heart of this model lies directability, which is formed through a combination of communication skills, work ethic, and particularly “intrinsic motivation and passion.” This finding fully corresponds with the

theory of Ashley et al. (2024) titled “Individual Coachability Theory.” The findings also showed that organizational support and training facilities create an atmosphere in which directability flourishes. This is consistent with the results of Febrian et al. (2023), which identified the workplace environment and servant leadership as vital factors in creating job satisfaction and acceptance of change. The results of the current study indicated that workplace challenges in sales are among the most significant intervening factors in the directability of sales staff at the Family Mall Baghdad complex. This finding is aligned with the results of Moradi et al. (2021). Moreover, the findings suggest that directability, as a fundamental competency, is the primary driver of professional development for employees and the enhancement of the organization. This result is aligned with the perspective of Ali Nikbakhsh et al. (2026). At the micro level, directability directly affects the efficiency of salespeople. According to the results of Fauzi (2023), proper coaching and guidance lead to a leap in employee performance. One of the vital solutions for realizing directability is the design of precise and scheduled training structures. The findings in this section showed that training should not be a periodic event but rather a continuous process. This is consistent with the emphasis by Burleigh et al. (2023) on the direct relationship between teaching/coaching performance and employee productivity. This research demonstrated that directability, beyond technical dimensions, is tied to the psychological and innate peace (Fitrah) of the individual. Based on Quranic teachings, directability is rooted in heart-centered tranquility and a readiness to receive corrective messages. When employees feel that the guidance process is directed toward human growth and the preservation of their citizenship rights, job anxiety levels decrease and are replaced by job satisfaction (Febrian et al., 2023). Realizing the final model requires operational strategies during the implementation phase. This process begins with validating the level of coachability in the workplace. The proposed strategy of this research is the use of an instructional and guiding leadership style, which was previously emphasized in the research of Shabani et al. (2024).

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest relevant to this work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI Use Statement

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Ethics Approval

All procedures performed in this study were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible institutional and national research committee.