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Marketing Training Strategies That Pharmaceutical Sales Managers Use To Reduce Unethical Behavior

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Abstract

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PhD, MCPHS University, 2015

MSc, University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, 2012

Pharm D, King Abdulaziz University, 2009

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

Some pharmaceutical company sales representatives are using bribes to encourage increasing prescribing medication. GlaxoSmithKline paid $31 billion on a felony charge related to bribing doctors to prescribe the company’s medications. Using Hunt and Vitell’s general theory of marketing ethics, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry used to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior. Data were collected from the company’s reports and documents provided by sales managers and semistructured interviews with 5 sales managers of different pharmaceutical companies in the northeast region of the United States. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and Yin’s 5-step process of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding data analysis. Three themes emerged from data analysis: developing ethical standards, developing organizational policy, and implementing training and development programs. A key recommendation is that pharmaceutical sales managers identify ethical standards to inculcate in their business practices to achieve ethical marketing training that can result in sales representatives’ ethical behavior. The implications for positive social change include the potential for sales managers to develop strategies to reduce unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry. Reducing unethical behavior may lead to more trust between patients and physicians, improving patient satisfaction, and promoting prosperity for the community through enhancing the quality of health care.

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Dedication

I dedicate my doctoral study to my lovely wife, who is lightening up my world. You inspired me to be a better man. I also dedicate my research to my son. I always want to be a role model for you. Your sense of humor relieves my stress and encourages me to have work-life balance.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge my committee chair, Dr. Kate Andrews. I appreciate your continued support during my journey of having my Doctoral of Business Administration degree. Thank you so much for your valuable explicit comments and feedback you provided. I also want to acknowledge the secondary committee member, Dr. James Glenn, and the university research reviewer, Dr. Ronald Jones, for their time, comments, and feedback.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The occurring unethical sales representative behavior is a phenomenon that destroy the credibility and reliability of the pharmaceutical industry (Munoz & Mallin, 2019). Some of the pharmaceutical company sales' representatives use bribes while marketing medications to doctors to encourage increasing prescribing medication (Peltier-Rivest, 2017). In this study, I explored unethical sales representative behavior in the pharmaceutical industry to identify strategies that sales managers could use to reduce unethical sales representative behavior.

Background of the Problem

Marketing strategies are important to the pharmaceutical companies because there is a positive correlation between marketing strategies and business performance (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016). Marketing strategies in the pharmaceutical industry include marketing the products through the deployment of sales representatives (Shaw & Whitney, 2016). The sales managers, in the pharmaceutical industry, provide essential and extensive training to ensure following all measures for selling the products to the physicians, clinics, or hospitals but unethical situations occur in the field (Khazzaka, 2019). The sales managers provide ethical considerations to sales representatives when performing their practice but their strategies tend to become unethical due to illegal transactions and relations with the physicians, hospitals, or clinics (Ameer & Halinen, 2019; Badrinarayanan et al., 2019a; Sasirekha, 2018). Therefore, it is imperative to conduct an empirical research to determine the actions and strategies done by sales managers in addressing the concerns shown by their sales representatives.

Problem Statement

Pharmaceutical company sales' representatives are marketing medications to doctors, and some are using bribes to encourage increasing prescribing medication (Peltier-Rivest, 2017). GlaxoSmithKline paid $31 billion in 2012 on a felony charge related to bribing doctors to prescribe the company's medications (Schipani et al., 2016). The general business problem that I addressed in this study was that unethical behavior of pharmaceutical company sales' representatives results in financial losses for the companies in the pharmaceutical industry. The specific business problem that I addressed in this study was that some sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry lack strategies to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry use to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior. The targeted population consisted of five sales managers located in the northeast region of the United States from three pharmaceutical companies who have successfully used marketing training strategies to reduce unethical sales representative behavior. The implications for positive social change include the potential to develop strategies to reduce unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry, which in turn may lead to more trust between patients and their physicians, improving patient satisfaction, and promotion of prosperity for the community through enhancing the quality of health care.

Nature of the Study

Yin (2018) mentioned three types of research methods (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed). Researchers performing qualitative research can accumulate a significant amount of data and derive themes from the responses of individuals participating in the research (Atchan et al., 2016). The qualitative research method was an appropriate research method for this study because I collected data from multiple participants and derived themes from the responses. The quantitative research method is suitable when researchers want to examine variables' characteristics or the relationship among variables by testing hypotheses (Magruk, 2015). Therefore, a quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because I did not study variables' characteristics or the relationship among variables. Mixed methods research includes both qualitative and quantitative methods (Archibald, 2016; Syed & Nelson, 2015). The mixed research method was not appropriate for this study because I collected qualitative data from the interview narratives to analyze and answer the research question, the use of quantitative data was only for verifying the actual success of the strategies and identifying the principal themes.

There are four principal designs for qualitative research: case study, phenomenological, narrative, and ethnography (Yin, 2018). Researchers use a case study design to describe a case in depth and within its real-world context (Lewis, 2015; Ridder, 2017). I used a multiple case study design because I explored several cases (not only one case) in depth within their real-world environments to enable inter case comparison of findings. Researchers use a phenomenological study design to describe the emotional and personal experience of the participants with phenomena (Letourneau, 2015).

Phenomenological design was not appropriate for my study because I did not describe the personal meanings of the participants' lived experiences. Using a narrative study design involves collecting life stories from study participants that results in a shared narrative context (Shapiro, 2016). I did not collect and explore life stories, so a narrative design was inappropriate for this study. Qualitative researchers use an ethnographic design to focus on a cultural exploration of the research topic (Baskerville & Myers, 2015). The ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study because I did not focus on exploring cultures.

Qualitative Research Question

What strategies do sales managers in the northeast United States use to improve marketing training for their pharmaceutical company representatives to reduce unethical behavior?

Interview Questions

1. What training strategies do you use to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior?
2. What framework(s) did you use to develop and implement your ethical marketing training program?
3. How did you assess the effectiveness of your strategies for marketing training?
4. What were the key challenges to implementing your strategies for ethical marketing training elements?
5. How did you overcome the key challenges in the implementation of ethical marketing training elements?

6. What additional information would you like to share that we did not cover during this interview about the strategies to improve marketing training used to reduce unethical sales representative behavior?

Conceptual Framework

For the conceptual framework of this study, I used the general theory of marketing ethics. In 1986, Hunt and Vitell (1986) developed the general theory of marketing ethics, and they explained decision-making processes that marketing managers employed to resolve ethical conflicts. Hunt and Vitell used a combination of utilitarian (intentional) and deontological (judgmental) assessments through their theory to create ethical marketing strategies. Utilitarian assessment means the action is right if its outcomes (consequences) have benefits to most others, whereas deontological assessment means looking at the morality of action itself based on rules rather than based on the consequences of that action (Hunt & Vitell, 1986).

According to Gürçay and Baron (2017), individuals use the utilitarian system to predict and discuss the consequences of an action. According to Gürçay and Baron, individuals use the deontological system to focus on an emotional impulse when responding to personal issues. Mayo and Marks (1990) used the general theory of marketing ethics and explored how marketing managers handled an ethical marketing problem. Generally, researchers have supported Hunt and Vitell's (1986) model after determining that combining of utilitarian and deontological assessments helps in determining the ethical judgments to resolve dilemmas (Jurković et al., 2018; Mayo & Marks, 1990). Individuals rely on utilitarian (intentional) or deontological (judgmental) factors in forming their ethical response to an action (Gawronski & Beer, 2017).

Therefore, the general theory of marketing ethics (including utilitarian and deontological factors or assessments) was an appropriate lens through which to explore strategies to improve marketing training for ethical marketing to reduce unethical behavior of sales representatives in the pharmaceutical industry.

Operational Definitions

Epoché: Epoché-reduction is a phenomenon of reducing bias during research through suspension of judgment (Van Manen, 2017). While conducting investigation, researchers avoid their preconceptions and personal beliefs to avoid bias (Van Manen, 2017).

Deontological assessment: Deontological assessment means to assess the action based on judgement (by looking at the morality of action itself based on rules rather than based on the consequences of that action; Hunt & Vitell, 1986).

Teleological assessment: Teleological assessment means to assess the action based on the intention, so the action is right if its outcomes have benefits to the majority of others (Hunt & Vitell, 1986).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The researchers defined assumptions as nonrealistic situations that are used as support in case there is no empirical evidence (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researchers use assumptions as conditions to justify the validity of results (Lindebaum et al., 2017; Preshaw et al., 2016). One of the assumptions in this study was that participants accurately remembered their experience dealing with ethical marketing situations to develop findings that reflect the real-life ethical marketing practice. Another assumption was the ability to capture the required data through the semistructured phone interview and so that themes emerged. Additionally, I assumed that my personal beliefs and experience did not interfere with the data collection process and presentation of the study findings.

Limitations

Marshall and Rossman (2016) described research limitations as study weaknesses or boundaries associated with conducting the study. Inability to generalize the study findings was one of this study's limitations. The limited number of participants (five sales managers) from a limited number of organizations (three pharmaceutical companies) located in a specific location (the northeast region of the United States) did not reflect the views of all sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry. Transferability of the findings to another industry was another limitation of this study because the focus was in pharmaceutical industry. A further limitation was the level of participants' honesty and accuracy while responding to my interview questions. Potential participants may mention that they have ethical behavior when they do not. Having dishonest or inaccurate information from participants would have resulted in including participants that they should not be included in this study.

Delimitations

The researchers defined *research delimitations* as the ability to control the research scope by identifying the research boundaries (e.g., population, geographical area, and sampling) (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2018). The population, in this study, consisted of five sales managers located in the northeast region of the United States from three pharmaceutical companies. Using a purposeful sampling method was another delimitation because the focus was on identifying sales manager (who have successfully used marketing training strategies to reduce unethical sales representative behavior) to provide truthful answers to the interview questions. A further delimitation was focusing the scope of this research on exploring strategies that some sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry use to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior; therefore, not tackling other critical matters (e.g., profitability) that might affect leaders at the organizations. In addition, asking the participants if they have successfully improved marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior was a delimitation.

Significance of the Study

Sales managers have the responsibility of maintaining ethical standards while marketing the company's products to buyers. Therefore, it is critical for sales managers, in the pharmaceutical industry, to improve training to reduce unethical behavior of sale representatives. Findings from this study may be of value to different sales managers at pharmaceutical companies wishing to reduce the unethical behavior of sale representatives. In the following headings, I will discuss the study's potential contributions to business practice and the implications for positive social change.

Contribution to Business Practice

Unethical behavior among pharmaceutical sales representatives is one of the leading causes for corruption and financial fraud in the pharmaceutical industry (Villalba, 2019). Managers in the pharmaceutical industry must address unethical behavior because ethics plays a crucial role in determining the performance of any business entity (Aziz et al., 2016). Pharmaceutical sales managers may use the results of this study to develop effective marketing training strategies to reduce unethical behavior of sales representative, which in turn may lead to improving organizational performance. According to Patwardhan (2016), addressing unethical behavior among the physicians, pharmacists, and pharmaceutical sales representatives resulted in increased transparency in the relationships and interactions among these professionals.

Implications for Social Change

According to Wei and Delbaere (2015), patients have become skeptical about the drugs that their physicians prescribe because some think that representatives of pharmaceutical companies use the physicians as agents of persuasion to market their prescribed brands. The results of this study may be beneficial to employees of the pharmaceutical companies, physicians, and the patients they serve. Addressing unethical behavior in the industry may enhance doctor-patient relationships and increase patient trust in the pharmaceutical industry. Good relations and trust between health care professionals and their patients may play a significant role in enhancing the quality of health care and improving patient satisfaction (Allen et al., 2016; Birkhäuer et al., 2017; Brown & Calnan, 2016; Hanse et al., 2016). The pharmaceutical companies can be a power for a positive social change by supporting nonprofit organizations and academic health care research through donations that bring future benefits to communities' citizens.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Corruption is a persistent problem affecting the health sector with severe implications on health status as well as social welfare (Salvioni et al., 2015). The pharmaceutical industry has contributed immensely to the corruption problem in health care and implies high risk to the social welfare (Badawi et al., 2015). Unethical behavior among the sales representatives is among the leading corruption factors in the pharmaceutical industry (Villalba, 2019). The primary purpose of this section is to provide critical analysis and synthesis of the literature related to the conceptual model, and the strategies that sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry use to improve ethical marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior.

I provided this review of the professional and academic literature to help in understanding the contexts in which managers may apply specific ethical marketing strategies as well as to demonstrate why certain ethical training strategies may be more important than others. I organized this review, so it includes six primary sections: conceptual framework, causes and effects of unethical behavior, benefits of addressing unethical behavior, challenges faced in addressing unethical behavior, relationship building as the appropriate strategy for addressing unethical behavior, and training strategies to reduce unethical behavior.

The strategy that I used was searching various databases and using the Walden University Library to identify peer-reviewed articles and scholarly seminal books related to the topic of interest. These databases were Science Direct, SAGE Journals, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, Google scholar, Expanded Academic ASAP, ABI/INFORM Collection, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Google Books, and Walden Library Books. I used various keywords and phrases in the search. These keywords and phrases were as follow: *ethical marketing, training, strategies, business, unethical, pharmaceutical sale representative, behavior*, and *general theory of marketing ethics*.

Conceptual Framework

For the conceptual framework of this study, I used the general theory of marketing ethics. In 1986, Hunt and Vitell (1986) developed the general theory of marketing ethics, and they explained decision-making processes that marketing managers employed to resolve ethical conflicts. Hunt and Vitell used a combination of teleological (intentional) and deontological (judgmental) assessments through their theory to create ethical marketing strategies. Teleological assessment means the action is right if its outcomes have benefits to the majority of others, whereas deontological assessment means looking at the morality of action itself based on rules rather than based on the consequences of that action (Hunt & Vitell, 1986).

The general theory of marketing ethics addresses the situation where a person confronts a problem perceived to contain ethical content. The existence of an ethical problem in a situation initiates the process (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). The model elements do not apply if no ethical problem an individual identified in the situation. The general theory of marketing ethics has helped in shaping research and knowledge development in ethical marketing and decision-making procedure (Gresham & Ferrel, 1985).

The theory contribution to marketing ethics influences the field of business ethics and marketing framework. According to Barnett (2001), ethical marketing consists of a normative framework that researchers derived from philosophy. Barnett utilized the normative framework elements to formulate decision models, principles, and research scales (Barnett, 2001). Additionally, the descriptive models developed help to explain organizational culture, managerial practices, and an ethical decision-making process. Historically, scholars mostly reviewed issues relating to social and consumers' protection aspects. During those times, Barnett addressed consumer protection features based on the social and societal perspective and applied marketing ethics in decisions that profited or protected stakeholders.

Hunt and Vitell (1986) focused the marketing ethics theory on addressing comprehensive business ethics (i.e., moral obligations, standards, and individual capability for good behavior). Based on Hunt and Vitell's perspective, an individual businessperson with positive moral behavior drives ethical behavior (Adams et al., 2001). The normative approach to marketing ethics involves procedures for improving ethical business procedures. Hunt (1990) defined a *normative approach* as trying to recommend what marketing individuals or organizations ought to do or types of marketing procedures a society ought to have. Thus, normative marketers emphasized "what can be." Sims and Keon (1999) indicated that a normative approach to marketing ethics can improve ethical behavior. Therefore, the normative framework focuses on moral philosophies such as justice, deontology, and teleology principles. Hunt further affirmed that the normative approach entails universal moral responsibilities and a proportionality framework concerned with intents and means of a decision. The approach also supports social justice context which highlights that every individual has the freedom to choose their own destiny and be treated justly by others (Gresham & Ferrel, 1985). Hence, the marketeers using the normative framework advocate for acceptance of set core principles and moral maxims. Marketeers use these elements as guide during the ethical decision-making procedure. The normative framework based largely on individual values that family, friends, and the community shaped.

Teleological and Deontological Norms

The general theory of marketing ethics combines the traditions of teleological and deontological theoretical ethical decisions (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). Based on this theory, the business environment such as culture, the organization, personal influences, and the industry impact how a person perceives an ethical decision. By applying deontological theory, a person can examine whether the action taken during a situation is ethical. Hunt and Vitell (1986) also indicated whether the action that is taken shows respect for the rights of other people. This process entails comparing behaviors using a set of prearranged deontological norms (Bass et al., 1999). These norms represent personal behavior or values. The person then evaluates alternative actions using teleology norms; this helps to identify the action that provides the most benefits.

Hunt and Vitell (1986) defined *teleology evaluation* as an examination of possible consequences, the desirability of consequences, and the value of the stakeholder (Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Weaver et al., 2000). For example, if the undesirable results of an action are doubtful or if the desirability of affirmative results is higher than negative results; then the person might decide to pursue the decision. This is because the teleological approach emphasizes achieving the greatest good for the largest number of people. Using teleological norms, the marketeers determine which participant benefits from the decision; the people that might suffer damage, and if the good offsets the bad. An individual’s approach to the action also plays a vital role in determining the person’s actual behavior.

Marketing leaders considered situational restraints as an opportunity (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). That is, if the person does not have an opportunity to become involved in a particular action, then the individual will be incapable to execute the action despite the intention or ethical judgment (Waters & Bird, 1987). Hence, individual behavior results from the actual consequences. These consequences become part of the individual personal experience and an individual can relied this experience later for other ethical problems. Despite the general theory of marketing ethics emphasize on normative norms, critics state that the theory is too descriptive. However, the theory should be descriptive in order to increase the understanding of normative factors (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). The theory is not predictive; however, marketing experts use the theory to understand cognitive processes associated with individual ethical perspectives (Barnett et al., 1998).

Hunt and Vitell (1986) described in their theory, the moral decision-making aspects involved in ethical decision contests in organizations. Hunt and Vitell recognized stakeholders' value in using teleological evaluation. The general theory of marketing ethics profoundly transformed the ethics landscape through its strict normative background of moral philosophy. The general theory of marketing ethics contributes largely to an individual decision-making process during situations which involve ethical issues (Borkowski & Ugras, 1988). Based on teleology and deontology evaluation, individuals can have various perceived alternatives and hence individuals are capable to decide ethical actions. The evaluation process leads to behavior and intentions. Based on that concept, an individual also recognizes that ethical judgment, behavior, and intention are not always completely consistent.

The general theory of marketing ethics is consistent with general consumer behavior theories; Hunt and Vitell (1986) suggested that ethical decisions impact individual behavior by intervening intention variables. Hunt and Vitell recommended in the model of the general theory of marketing ethics that marketeers using both intentions and ethical decisions are better analysts of behavior in a situation where ethical aspects are essential rather than peripheral. The researchers also affirmed that ethical decisions sometimes differ from intention because teleology valuation also affects intentions independently (Adams et al., 2001). When marketeers developing intention and behavior that are inconsistent with the ethical decision, feelings of guilt exist (Hunt & Vitell, 186). Having two thoughts that are inconsistence called cognitive dissonance (Hinojosa et al., 2017). Individuals can resolve cognitive dissonance through different methods to restore consistency (a) changing one of the thought that caused dissonance, or (b) changing behavior that related to inconsistency, or (c) adding a new thought that help rationalize inconsistency, or (d) trivialize the inconsistency (McGrath, 2017). Negative consequences of cognitive dissonance motivate to resolve inconsistency (McGrath, 2017). The sales managers provide ethical considerations to sales representatives when performing their practice but their strategies tend to become unethical due to illegal transactions and relations with the physicians, hospitals, or clinics (Ameer et al., 2019; Badrinarayanan et al., 2019a; Sasirekha, 2018). Therefore, it is imperative to conduct an empirical research to determine the actions and strategies done by sales managers in addressing the concerns shown by their sales representatives. I used the general theory of marketing ethics as a lens to explore strategies to improve marketing training for ethical marketing to reduce unethical behavior of sales representatives in the pharmaceutical industry.

Action Control

Action control entails the scope to which an individual applies control in the enactment of intent in a situation (Barnett et al., 1998). Marketeers using situational restraints might have behavior that is inconsistent with ethical decisions and intentions. For example, situational restraints such as sale opportunity may result in the adoption of the alternative. Therefore, an individual should evaluate and then valuate of the actual consequences of the chosen alternative to produce feedback based on personal characteristics variable. Additionally, punishment and reward system could change individual behavior when involved in an ethical content situation. Based on general theory of marketing ethics, Donaldson and Dunfee (1994) affirmed that a person may be accustomed to behaving ethically.

Factors that Influence the Ethical Decision-Making Process

Personal Attributes

Based on the general theory of marketing ethics, Hunt and Vitell (1986) identified personal attributes that influence aspects of ethical decision-making procedures. For example, individual religion influences ethical norms; people perceived as highly religious individuals are also perceived as having more defined deontological norms. These norms play a vital role in determining an individual’s ethical judgment. In consumer ethics settings, Gundlach and Murphy (1993) identified that inherent religious beliefs significantly determine consumer ethical beliefs. However, extrinsic religious beliefs have little influence on individual ethical beliefs (Gundlach & Murphy, 1993). Both extrinsic and inherent religious beliefs entail individuals integrating religious norms and faith in everyday life. These beliefs are a source of social support, status, and self-justification.

Personal Values

A person's value also influences the decision process. Gresham and Ferrel (1985) examined numerous values that influence the decision-making process. For example, managerial commitment represents a value that determines the decision-making process. Companies with high ethical values have employees who are more committed to the firm's welfare (Gresham & Ferrel, 1985). However, individuals can exhibit high ethical commitment because of organizational values. Therefore, companies should make the decision-making process and organizational commitment values the top priority (Gresham & Ferrel, 1985).

Personal Beliefs

Based on the general theory of marketing ethics, Hunt and Vitell (1986) also focused on beliefs that reflect on how individuals believe the world works. For example, to what magnitude does a person believe that self-interest exclusively motivate individuals is one way a person may believe the world works. Using a moral viewpoint, individuals believe that other people look at ethical egotism as a guide. Hunt and Vitell proposed, in their theory, that the extent to which a person believes in ethical egoism and self-interest approach is how the world works; this belief influences individual behavior. Hence, individual moral character strength is a vital moderator of relations between behavior and intentions. Additionally, role models are important in developing an upright moral character. Thus, individuals with good moral character have the strength to behave in consistent ways using a set ethical judgment (Bass et al., 1999).

Cognitive Moral Development

Based on Hunt and Vitell (1986)'s study, a cognitive moral development level has an influence on the ethical decision making process. The higher phase of cognitive development indicates the greater capability to reason through difficult ethical situations (Adams et al., 2001). Hence, individuals with high cognitive moral development bring more deontological standards during any situation and would consider the interest of people (with higher job rank) in their decision-making process. Some people are ethically conscious, while others never recognize ethical issues involved in the decision-making process.

Cultural Environment

Hunt and Vitell (1986) recognized that ethical problems exist in a business framework, hence they explored ethical issues in marketing. Thus, Jones (1991) metioned that Hunt and Vitell emphasized the general theory of marketing ethics on the importance of the cultural environment that influences the ethical decision-making process. Based on the general theory of marketing ethics, companies have complex norms which form a structure where individuals socialize (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). Additionally, the general theory of marketing ethics provides a structure for expounding on people's moral codes, distrust, and belief as parts of the cultural environment in such a company.

Personal Moral Principles

The general theory of marketing ethics holds that personal moral principles differences result from variances in the following:

- The rules for merging teleology and deontological evaluations.
- The deontological standards held.

- The comparative significance of specific norms.
- The procedures for solving conflicts among norms.
- The procedures for interpreting norms applicability in certain situations.
- The significance weights allocated to a specific stakeholder.
- The rules for linking teleological components.
- The supposed positive (highly significant) or negative (very insignificant) values for a stakeholder.
- The apparent probabilities of both negative and positive values for a stakeholder.

Some personal moral principles emphasize deontological norms, whereas others emphasize teleological norms. Considering personal moral norms implied by neoclassical traditional in economics, every person is a utility gauge which interprets self-interest maximization (Roozen et al., 2001). In the general theory of marketing ethics framework, deontological valuation is null, and individuals formed all ethical decisions based on teleological valuation (Roozen et al., 2001). Moreover, the essential weights allocated to stakeholders other than individual's aspects are assigned null (Roozen et al., 2001). Thus, in the neoclassical tradition, all individuals have personal moral values that guide them to select the alternative that portrays the highest score (particularly in high restricted teleological evaluation procedures where the importance weights for stakeholders other than an individual) (Roozen et al., 2001). For example, based on the economics cost transaction, economic man is a more delicate; deceitful person and self-interest pursuing person (Weaver et al., 2000). In cost economics transaction, homo economics maximizes self-interest and the opportunistic astuteness (Weaver et al., 2000). Therefore, universal opportunism is ubiquitous even among less opportunistic people (Weaver et al., 2000).

Some personal moral values spawn distrust, particularly when the society has the dominant culture (Barnett, 2001). Dominant culture focuses only on teleological evaluation; hence, with null importance weights for all stakeholders other than an individual, social belief cannot exist. The more individuals accept the neoclassical paradigm as their behavior guide, the more their capability to sustain a market economy is weakened (Barnett, 2001). However, if personal moral values assume that utility maximization spawn distrust, then which moral values present trust? Personal values in terms of the general theory of marketing ethics model emphasized deontological evaluation as a key component of ethical decision making. Predominantly, based on the general theory of marketing ethics, an individual can argue that moral values based on deontological ethics embrace society's dominant culture that sustains social trust. When society shares moral values based on deontological morals, trust can exist. When trust exists in a society, individuals avoid attributes such as cheating, dishonesty, stealing and shirking. Additionally, the culture will emphasize ethics that contribute to community development (Barnett et al., 1998).

Application of the General Theory of Marketing Ethics

Hunt and Vitell (1986) mentioned that using the general theory of marketing ethics in the classroom fosters ethics-education outcomes. These ethics-educations outcomes include

- Encourage learners to understand and potentially review in a reflective approach their moral values.

- Enable learners to perceive moral conflicts, responsibilities, and issues; this is helped by developing deontological norms.
- Assist learners to understand moral aspects based on a situation; the instructor (based on the theory) directs the students to focus on moral aspects involved in the decision-making process.
- Help learners to handle moral conflicts and issues; by providing students with integrated tools and experience when analyzing ethical dimensions in the classroom.

Ethical Perspectives Embodied in the General Theory of Marketing Ethics

Hunt and Vitell (1986) recognized that resolution of any ethical problem depends on the philosophical perspective applied by the decision maker. Each perspective contains its own inherent limitations thus Hunt and Vitell emphasized the theory as combining more than one philosophical approach when resolving ethical problems. For example, in the theory, Hunt and Vitell combined two main philosophical approaches; teleological and deontological, to resolve ethical issues hypothesized by marketing managers. The theory attempts to define constructs and interrelations inappropriate details in order to guide the study of marketing decisions relating to ethical problems. Deontological evaluation involves the assessment of the inherent virtue of each substitute being deliberated for adoption. Individuals conducted the valuation by using personal values prompted by the ethical problem of each alternative.

Conversely, teleological evaluation measures the badness or goodness of consequences which might result from the implementation of each alternative (Waber & Gillespie, 1998). Teleological valuation analysis considers desirable and credibility of each alternative, for example, consumers not getting the anticipated value from a product because of inaccurate advertisement. Hunt and Vitell (1986) specified interrelations and constructs that enable individuals to focus on portions during initial testing. Hence, this model entails developing scenarios that present ethical problems and provides numerous alternatives to resolve ethical problems. The central claim of the proposed model portrays decision-making procedures that have ethical content. Equivalently, Donaldson and Dunfee (1994) claimed that, based on the general theory of marketing ethics model, the proposed relationships among core variables; accurately and significantly reflects the approach in which individuals resolve ethical problems. Thus, Hunt and Vitell proposed that

- Deontological values considerably influence deontological evaluations.
- The desirability of action consequences considerably impacts teleological evaluations.
- Ethical decisions are considerably impacted by teleological and deontological evaluations.
- The intent to implement a certain alternative is considerably impacted by the ethical decision and teleological assessments.

In addition, Hunt and Vitell (1986) suggested that teleological assessment entails the function of desirability of consequences, probable consequences and the significance of stakeholders. Therefore, teleological and deontological valuations, undertaken together, explain the higher ratio of variance in ethical decision-making than when taken separately (Weber, 1992). Hence, based on the general theory of marketing ethics, the individuals might not adopt an ethical alternative if the action does not lead to one or more desired results. In such a condition, the individual's teleological assessment of the results might be primarily influenced by intentions. Thus, the ethical decision might vary from intentions because teleological valuations can independently affect intentions construct. The mutual impact of teleological and deontological procedures is the norm because in some situation a person might favor one action over the other. However, Chang (1988) found that teleological assessment contained the strongest impact on ethical decision-making and intentions. This transpires because personal moral development level might impact the type of decision process. For example, a manager might look for an alternative in order to identify which action is wrong and right. However, an individual in a higher position might have high-level moral development that internally helps to determine what is right or wrong (Neil, 1990).

The specific procedures applied during the decision-making process impact the process and criteria used in resolving ethical issues. Individuals determine the marketing decision process based on information sources preferred and how they can process that information. Therefore, marketing styles may estimate teleological or deontological approaches used to resolve ethical problems (Weber, 1996). Thus, the general theory of marketing ethics helps individuals to understand the situation under which a specific valuation process may dominate. Most of ethical problems might not be selected because the action might lead to some desired consequences being also confirmed (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). This happens because the intent to adopt the alternative is only influenced by ethical decisions and teleological assessments. I used the general theory of marketing ethics (including utilitarian and deontological factors or assessments) as a lens through which to explore strategies to improve marketing training for ethical marketing to reduce unethical behavior of sales representatives in the pharmaceutical industry.

Causes and Effects of Unethical Behavior Among Pharmaceutical Sales Representatives

Unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry has become a common practice that has captured the attention of many individuals and groups and has had severe implications (George, 2016; Skandrani & Sghaier, 2016). For instance, patients have become skeptical about the drugs that their physicians prescribe because some think that representatives of pharmaceutical companies used the physicians as agents of persuasion for the prescribed brands (Wei & Delbaere, 2015). In such instances, some patients may prefer generic drugs to the prescribed brands or may choose to avoid the pharmaceuticals entirely in favor of alternatives such as natural remedies.

Patients attributed unethical behavior among the sales representatives to the profession itself, which is viewed as a subculture on its own (Bush et al., 2017). Unlike other professionals, sales representatives are employees who work in an increasingly complex and multifunctional environment that may provide numerous opportunities for unethical behavior (Bush et al., 2017). For example, sales representatives may come across customers demanding bribes or commissions from them to buy their products (Button et al., 2018; Lord & Levi, 2017; Raj & Roy, 2016). Also, sales representatives may be under pressure by supervisors and senior managers to bring in more business, which influences them to focus on numbers at the expense of other attributes such as ethics and integrity (Zhou et al., 2016). Therefore, it is critical to observe unethical behavior among the sales representatives from the lens of the environment in which they operate because sometimes they are only doing what must be done (de Andrade et al., 2018).

Pharmaceutical markets are characterized by a derived demand process in which intermediaries (physicians) influence the end consumers (patients) to purchase the product (Yehya, 2016). Therefore, pharmaceutical companies' sales representatives may have used push strategies to influence the physicians to prescribe their drugs to the patients (Suebphanwongs, 2016). Push strategies are a fast approach to transfer a customer (physician) from awareness to purchase (Suebphanwongs, 2016). There is a difference between push and pull strategies. Salespersons use a push strategy to push a product at a customer. Oppositely, using a pull strategy is to pull a customer towards a product (Suebphanwongs, 2016).

The relationship between the physicians and the sales representatives determines the speed of adoption of new drugs (Matikainen et al., 2017). Thus, positive relationships may facilitate early adoption while negative relationships may delay the adoption of drugs. However, not all researchers published studies support this view. For instance, Fickweiler et al. (2017) indicated that most physicians do not believe that their interactions with pharmaceutical companies' sales representatives influence their prescription habits. Therefore, the physicians indicated that they can distinguish between marketing strategies and scientific facts about new drugs (Fickweiler et al., 2017). Also, the physicians mentioned that medical and governmental institutions had developed guidelines and self-regulatory checks to regulate the relationships between physicians and the pharmaceutical companies' sales representatives (Fickweiler et al., 2017). According to Hewett and Krasnikov (2016), the quality of relationships between physicians and pharmaceutical companies' sales representatives declines in the presence of authoritative mechanisms. Preventing undue influence on physicians by the pharmaceutical companies' sales representatives is among the objectives of having those regulations in place (Fickweiler et al., 2017).

The unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry is complex and multifaceted and thus society cannot entirely blame the sales representatives (Brown et al., 2016; Robbins, 2018; Taylor et al., 2016). For example, there are instances where the physicians expect favors to prescribe certain drugs to the patients (de Andrade et al., 2018). In such cases, even the ethical sales representatives may be influenced to avoid losing business, which can result in financial losses. As long as there is intense competition in the industry, there will always be companies with unethical sales representatives ready to meet the demands of the physicians that expect favors.

According to Skandrani and Sghaier (2016), unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry can arise from job characteristics, corporate, situational, personal, stakeholder, or cultural factors. Kadic-Maglajlic et al. (2019) mentioned that micro-level (personal), meso-level (corporate), and macro-level (industrial) factors influenced ethical behavior. However, sales representative personal moral as well as the industrial ethical environment are more positively associated with customer satisfaction. On the other hand, corporate and industrial ethical norms have a combined stronger effect on customer orientation compared to each of the ethical climates alone. Therefore, training employees to enhance personal ethical behavior may not necessarily result in high customer retention, especially if the overall ethical climate in the industry is wanting. Besides, Kadic-Maglajlic et al. (2019) further noted that moral equity by a sales representative correlates strongly to customer orientation, but strong moral equity beliefs can result in weaker sales outcomes when applied in situations requiring adaptive selling.

Benefits of Addressing Unethical Behavior

Pharmaceuticals have to play a vital role in the recovery of the ailing health care sector (Salvioni et al., 2015). Addressing unethical behavior in the industry may lead to better customer relationships and trust in the pharmaceutical industry as well as physicians. Good relations and trust between the health care professionals and the patients play a significant role in enhancing the quality of health care (Allen et al., 2016; Birkhäuer, et al., 2017; Brown & Calnan, 2016; Hanse et al., 2016). Training sales representatives on ethical marketing practices to avoid unethical behavior will make the pharmaceutical industry more trustworthy, which will enhance health care quality. In some countries, pharmaceutical companies' sales managers are focusing more on building ethical behavior and ensuring that employees understand the organizations they work for (Lőrinczy & Formánková, 2015). So, this is important because developing trust-based long-term relationships between buyers and sellers requires ethical behavior among the sales persons as well as the other people involved in the sales within an organization (Ingram et al., 2015).

Incorporating the training and development programs into business processes and marketing strategies increases the impact of training on the competitiveness of a firm (Cloutier et al., 2015). Incorporating the ethical marketing training and development programs meant to reduce unethical behavior will likely improve the competitive positioning of pharmaceutical companies. The relationships that the pharmaceutical companies' sales representatives build after the training, will create more loyal customers, and result in increased sales when the managers incorporate ethical marketing training program in the overall business strategy (Cloutier et al., 2015).

Researchers indicated that unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry must be addressed because ethics play a key role in determining the performance of any business entity (Aziz et al., 2016; Barrett et al., 2017). However, some of the measures intended to address the unethical behavior in pharmaceutical companies such as the top-down directives have been ineffective, necessitating the need for more dynamic intervention mechanisms such as the training of employees on ethical marketing to reduce unethical behavior (Barrett et al., 2017). Ethical marketing training enhances trust and loyalty with customers (Barrett et al., 2017).

Although interactions between physicians, and pharmaceutical representatives may bring benefits to the health care industry, they influence the drug prescription and dispensing activities, which can be detrimental to the quality of care given to the patients (Hajjar et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important that policy makers come up with new policies to regulate the interactions between the physicians, pharmacists, and pharmaceutical sales representatives and penalize misconduct. Such policies will not only ensure ethical conduct among the health care professionals in the pharmaceutical industry but will also protect the patients from the challenges that might arise from unscrupulous drug prescription activities that may have results such as developing drug resistance.

Following the challenges associated with the interaction between the physicians, pharmacists, and pharmaceutical sales representatives, some experts have recommended the cutting of links between physicians and the pharmaceutical industry. However, researchers recommend establishing ethical guidelines indicating how the interactions should have a better approach (Gupta et al., 2016). These ethical guidelines should include detailed information to indicate the extent to which the professionals can interact and the things they should not do as a result of the interaction. Although the ethical guidelines can minimize unethical behavior while maintaining the interactions between health care professionals, there is no guarantee they will follow it.

Addressing unethical behavior among physicians, pharmacists, and pharmaceutical sales representatives will result in increased transparency in the relationships and interactions among these professionals (Patwardhan, 2016). For example, mandating that the pharmaceutical sales representatives provide full disclosure of the gifts they give the physicians, and mandating the physicians to disclose the value of the gifts they receive will make it easier to determine the extent to which a physician’s prescription actions are influenced by aggressive marketing activities by the pharmaceutical representatives (Grundy et al., 2018). Sometimes the physicians are unaware of the social psychology used by pharmaceutical sales representatives to influence their prescription activities (Patwardhan, 2016). Therefore, establishing ethical guidelines would protect the physicians from social psychology manipulations by pharmaceutical sales representatives (Giacomini et al., 2016; Rios et al., 2016; Tobin, 2018; Wallang & Taylor, 2018). I used the general theory of marketing ethics as a lens to explore strategies to improve marketing training for ethical marketing to reduce unethical behavior of sales representatives in the pharmaceutical industry.

Challenges Faced in Addressing Unethical Behavior

Systemic failures have contributed to the ineffectiveness of the measures adopted by pharmaceutical companies’ sales managers to deal with the unethical behavior of sales representatives (Barrett et al., 2017). Ethical dilemmas emerge, making it difficult for the sales representatives to choose the ethical route when marketing their company's products (Musto et al., 2015). For example, stiff competition in the industry can influence sales representatives to offer incentives such as commissions or bribes to the physicians to prescribe drugs from their companies and thus meet the sales volume targets. Hence, the ethical dilemma indicates that sales representatives and sales managers will often have to make decisions regarding whether to follow the ethical route and compromise business or follow the business route and compromise ethics. Depending on the performance of the sales team and the existing market conditions, ethical dilemmas may arise, making it challenging to address unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry.

Researchers indicated that many physicians have not read the ethical guidelines indicating how they should interact with pharmaceutical sales representatives (Gupta et al., 2016). Therefore, the ethical guidelines established to limit unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry and health care organizations have not been implemented because only a few of the professionals they are intended for have read, or follow them. Therefore, it is important that policy makers ensure that the ethical guidelines they come up with to regulate interactions between physicians, pharmacists, and pharmaceutical sales representatives are adopted by these professionals. It is better not to have the ethical guidelines than have them and fail to implement them. Therefore, stringent measures should be undertaken to ensure that all physicians, pharmacists, and pharmaceutical sales representatives read the ethical guidelines intended to ensure ethical interactions among them.

Some pharmaceutical sales representatives believe that the pressure on them to ensure ethical behavior when interacting with the physicians is because of the lack of understanding by their sales people. For example, pharmaceutical representatives have been criticized for giving gifts to the physicians because it is seen as a way of bribing the latter as their objective is to push their drugs (Patwardhan, 2016). Therefore, pharmaceutical representatives holding onto this way of thinking cannot critically consider the ethical guidelines meant to ensure effective interactions with physicians and other key stakeholders in pharmaceutical and health care industries.

Mangers at pharmaceutical companies are greatly involved in funding medical education and research (Harris, 2017). Consequently, many physicians have a relationship with the pharmaceutical industry because they are involved in medical education. If the world was perfect, physicians and researchers would operate without money from the pharmaceutical industry (Harris, 2017). However, the world is not perfect and thus the physicians and medical researchers need the money offered by the managers at pharmaceutical companies. Unfortunately, the managers do not provide the funding as a sign of good gesture but a purchase of influence (Harris, 2017). Therefore, the physicians benefiting from the funding from the managers at pharmaceutical companies either in research or medical education are more likely to prescribe drugs from those companies even when there is pressure for them to embrace ethical standards. Driven by sales and revenue objectives of the pharmaceutical companies, sales representatives will continue to encourage physicians and medical researchers to enroll in projects funded by the pharmaceutical companies and in the process earn their affection, which can influence prescription habits (Kamal et al., 2015; Gautam & Pan, 2016).

Marketing leaders should continuously address emerging ethical issues (Jain et al., 2017; Sonnerfeldt & Loft, 2018). However, managers at the pharmaceutical companies have not been able to update their code of ethics regularly to keep up with the emerging unethical issues among pharmaceutical sales representatives, pharmacists, and physicians (Ichikawa & Clayton, 2016). Therefore, the existing ethical guidelines (by the American Marketing Association) cannot be sufficient in addressing the unethical issues facing the industry. To update the code of ethics (Code of Conduct from the American Marketing Association) regularly, managers at pharmaceutical companies may require ethics experts who understand how the pharmaceutical industry operates, especially the interactions between physicians, pharmacists, as well as pharmaceutical sales representatives (Latten et al., 2018). The purpose of the continuous review of the code of conduct should be to provide regulatory guidelines to deter new and emerging unethical practices among the pharmaceutical sales representatives.

Sales managers at pharmaceutical companies have not done enough to empower their sales representatives on how to identify and address ethical violations (Emran, 2015). There are various ways that pharmaceutical managers can empower their employees to address ethical issues such as implementing ethics-training programs for existing and new employees (Fickweiler et al., 2017). Addressing unethical behavior will remain a challenge as long as the ethics-training programs remain insufficient.

Ethical Marketing as the Appropriate Strategy for Reducing Unethical Behavior

Unethical issues by the pharmaceutical representatives may include falsifying daily call reports, misusing samples, as well as making disparaging remarks about the competitors (Skandrani & Sghaier, 2016). Bribing of physicians by the sales representatives to prescribe their medicine to patients is another ethical issues in the pharmaceutical industry (Skandrani & Sghaier, 2016). The researchers have indicated that unethical behavior is among the issues ailing the pharmaceutical industry and is thus relevant to my study. Ethical marketing training can be an effective strategy for reducing unethical behavior in pharmaceutical companies.

Durable customer relationships in business-to-business sales environment have emerged as an important aspect in today's business environment (Schwepker, 2015). Building strong customer relationships requires ethical behavior among the sales representatives or corporations to earn the trust of the customers and develop sustainable relationships (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Cuevas et al., 2016; Johnsen & Lacoste, 2016; Yoo & Arnold, 2016). To ensure ethical marketing and behavior among the sales representatives and empower them to make ethical decisions that improve sales performance, sales managers at pharmaceutical companies should evaluate the ethical loopholes among the sales representatives and come up with the ethical marketing training programs to reduce unethical behavior.

Social media has emerged as a powerful technological tool for business-to-business relationship building (Niedermeier et al., 2016). Therefore, sales representatives for pharmaceutical corporations should consider social media as an alternative to offering incentives and bribes to the physicians to prescribe their drugs. Social media is becoming a widely accepted communication tool for business. Social media provides real-time engagement between sales representatives and the customers. Managers of pharmaceutical corporations should thus train sales representatives on social media for ethical marketing as an alternative way. If the sales representatives succeed in ethical marketing and building long-term productive customer relationships, they will manage to meet their sales targets and avoid the unethical behaviors they engage in to meet the targets such as bribing of the physicians.

Leaders viewed trust as an important factor in defining provider-patient relationships (Patwardhan, 2016). Therefore, the openness of the patients to the health care providers, mainly physicians, about their problems is based on trust. Therefore, the patients trust that physicians will use the information to provide the best diagnosis and prescribe the most appropriate drugs (Birkhäuer et al., 2017). However, to maximize the profits, pharmaceutical companies benefit from the sale of drugs that require physicians to prescribe their drugs to the patients. Physicians may be influenced by pharmaceutical sales representatives to provide prescriptions that favor certain pharmaceutical corporations, which would amount to unethical behavior (Patwardhan, 2016). Therefore, physicians face many moral dilemmas in deciding whether to provide prescriptions they best believe would address the patient's problem or those preferred by representatives of pharmaceutical corporations. To avoid this problem, pharmaceutical sales representatives should avoid giving gifts to the physicians and instead ethically marketing the drugs and establish relationships of trust they can use to explain the benefits of their drugs (Fickweiler et al., 2017). On the other hand, physicians should develop a relationship of trust with the patients and sales representatives of various pharmaceutical companies in order to understand the benefit of each drug and thus prescribe the right amount to the right patients (Fickweiler et al., 2017).

Under relationships of mutual understanding, physician can have the confidence to explain to a sales representative of a given pharmaceutical company why the physician prescribed a drug from a different company (Brax et al., 2017). Therefore, relationships of trust based on ethical marketing should exist between physicians and the sales representatives of different pharmaceutical companies to ensure that the drug prescription process is transparent (Patwardhan, 2016). In the event that the condition of a given patient can be treated using drugs from different companies, the physician can ensure balance in the prescription to prevent favoring a particular company over others and thus eliminate suspicions of engagement in corrupt or unethical practices (Patwardhan, 2016). I used the general theory of marketing ethics as a lens to explore strategies to improve marketing training for ethical marketing to reduce unethical behavior of sales representatives in the pharmaceutical industry.

Training Strategies To Reduce Unethical Behavior

Training has been an essential corporate function because of the role it plays in the development of turning employees into leaders and enhancing their skills (Hussain & Soomro, 2018). Training and development play a critical role in developing a cohesive workforce that is loyal to the organization (Cloutier et al., 2015). Also, formal training and development teach the employees the need to adhere to the code of ethics of their organization, so they embrace ethical behavior. Unethical behavior in corporations and sales organizations is more prevalent than it has been before 2015 (Ingram et al., 2015). These sentiments are like those mentioned by Wei and Delbaere (2015) who indicated the value of intensive training of pharmaceutical companies’ sales representatives leads to the sales representatives avoiding unethical behavior. Unless managers take precautionary measures, skepticism can result in customers influencing one another to rely on natural remedies and other alternatives to pharmaceuticals. Therefore, it is fair to say that Wei and Delbaere's research is of great value to the study because they projected unethical behavior as a threat to the future of the pharmaceutical industry. So, there is a need to train pharmaceutical companies' sales representatives on ethical marketing to reduce unethical behavior.

The presence of sales representatives engaging in unethical behavior when marketing pharmaceuticals to physicians could be an indication that many sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry lack effective strategies for ethical marketing training to reduce unethical behavior. Sales representatives encourage unethical behavior because of the repetitive incidence of failure in making profit (Bolander et al., 2017). Therefore, sales managers should direct the code of conduct measures and guidelines adopted to address the unethical behavior. Managers should ensure addressing these factors while training their sales representatives on ethical marketing and relationship building to reduce unethical behavior. Skandrani and Sghaier (2016) indicated that undertaking training programs to prevent the negative effects of unethical behavior and enhance ethical awareness among medical representatives would be a necessary action that would improve the reputation of pharmaceutical companies and result in the development of long-term business relationships. However, Skandrani and Sghaier have not specified the kind of training programs that sales managers should undertake and implement. Nevertheless, researchers in other recent studies have attempted to fill the research gap. For example, Sridhar and Lyngdoh (2017) conducted a study on 192 pharmaceutical salespersons and indicated that information sharing influenced ethical marketing behavior. Therefore, sales managers should consider sharing drugs' adverse events information as one of the critical ethical marketing training areas. This training area may reduce unethical behavior for the sales representatives. Schwepker (2015) indicated that direct and indirect ethical leadership through salesforce socialization enhanced the performance of a sales representative. Moreover, the managers need to regularly remind the sales representatives about the need to always act in the best interest of the customer (Bolander et al., 2017).

According to Ingram et al. (2015), the best ethical marketing training strategy to reduce unethical behavior should involve six steps: (a) assessing the marketing training needs, (b) setting the training objectives, (c) evaluating the training alternatives, (d) designing the marketing training program, (e) implementing the marketing training, and (f) conducting follow-up and evaluation of the training. Undertaking marketing needs assessment is important to determine the specific performance-related skills, perceptions, attitudes, as well as behaviors required for the success of the marketing team (Ingram et al., 2015). Researchers have defined ethical behavior components in literature (Ou et al., 2015). Honesty, non-harassment, privacy, security, and avoiding overharvest are components that define ethical marketing behavior (Ou et al., 2015). Ethical training programs to reduce unethical sales representative behavior should focus on instilling the values that reflect the stated ethical behavior components to enhance the quality of customer relationships (Ou et al., 2015). The assessment would thus reveal the need to change or reinforce one or several behavior components of sales team performance. In the assessment of the training needs, it is imperative to determine the knowledge, skills, as well as the abilities the salespeople need to have to meet both the sales team level and organizational level goals and objectives.

In most cases, organizations have been reactive rather than proactive in undertaking sales training (Ingram et al., 2015). Therefore, the training often occurs when the managers recognized the decline in performance either through a drop-in sales volume, increasing costs, or lack of morale. So, it is an ineffective way because the training should be undertaken to prevent such problems from arising and thus ensure sustainable growth in the productivity of the sales team.

For the training to be effective, the sales managers should conduct the needs assessment and consider the training that is appropriate for different salespersons such as entry-level salespersons as well as the experienced salespersons (Ingram et al., 2015). Different tools for the needed assessment are available such as sales team audit, performance testing, sales team survey, customer survey, and job analysis among others. The sales managers who conducted the correct sales assessment will determine the success of the other steps outlined in the sales training process based on the results of the sales assessment.

Integrating training and development programs in the business strategies of pharmaceutical companies would help the sales managers get the support they need regarding resources and personnel and thus manage to train the pharmaceutical companies' sales representatives on ethical marketing and building relationships while reducing unethical behavior (Cloutier et al., 2015). Therefore, managers of pharmaceutical corporations should ensure the incorporation of training and development programs in the overall business strategies. As such, managers assigned resources to the programs during budgeting, which enabled the managers to continually train the pharmaceutical companies' sales representatives on ethical marketing to reduce unethical behavior. With adequate budgets for the program, the managers can hire trainers and outsource trainers specialized in specific fields whenever necessary. However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of the training of the pharmaceutical sales representatives to influence them to avoid unethical behavior will depend on factors beyond the training programs adopted. For instance, the training programs may not work in instances where the sales representatives have remunerated on commission basis because acting ethically would result in loss of income (Barrett et al., 2017).

Providing education to employees in a classroom setting has been used to train employees on a number of issues such as importance of working in teams, embracing ethical behavior, and having emotional intelligence among other critical issues facilitating the success of staff members (McEwan et al., 2017). Because managers used the strategy successfully in training employees in many settings, we can consider this as an approach that may work in various situations. Therefore, sales managers at the pharmaceutical companies can utilize it in training their sales representatives on ethical marketing to reduce unethical behavior. The sales managers should set up classroom settings within their premises and require the sales representatives to attend the lessons on ethical marketing at specified times. The managers at the Human Resource Departments should greatly be involved in the arrangements for employee training and ensuring that all sales representatives participate.

The managers can use interactive workshops as employee-training strategies (McEwan et al., 2017). They involve the employees participating in various activities in an interactive environment in which other participants can react to such actions in the most appropriate way to complement the doer or provide opportunities for improvement

(McEwan et al., 2017). This strategy is perhaps the best in training pharmaceutical sales representatives on ethical marketing. The sales managers can require the sales representatives to attend workshops and may take up roles of sales representatives, physicians, and pharmacists, and interact in ways that can improve marketing and avoid unethical behavior. The objective of the workshops should be to identify activities to be avoided and those to be upheld in practice.

The sales managers trained the employees and used simulation training in which teams experientially enact teamwork skills such as interpersonal communication and coordination in an environment that mimics upcoming events (McEwan et al., 2017). The managers also can use the same strategy to train employee on relationship building as part of the ethical marketing (McEwan et al., 2017). Various relationship building skills may include interpersonal communication in an environment that mimics upcoming events such as interaction with physicians from a given district.

Transition

In Section 1, I presented the background of the problem, the problem statement, and purpose statement. The nature of the study includes justifications for selecting the research method and research design. Then, I provided the research question and interview questions. After that, I discussed the conceptual framework for this study, and mentioned some operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. The discussion related to the significance of the study included contribution to effective business practice and contribution to positive social change. The review of the professional and academic literature contains a critical analysis and synthesis of various sources and content of the literature to convince readers of depth of inquiry.

Section 2 includes the purpose statement, role of the researcher, and information related to selecting participants for this study. Also, I provide information related the research method and research design. After that, I discuss the population of this study and the method of sampling. The ethical considerations include a discussion that focus on maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of this study participants. Then, there is a discussion of the data collection instruments and techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis. After that, I explain the methods of ensuring reliability and validity of this study.

Section 3 includes the finding of this study and application to professional practice. Then, I present implications for social change and my recommendation for action. After that, I provide a discussion that covers my recommendations for further research, reflections, and the study conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry use to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior. The targeted population consisted of five sales managers located in the northeast region of the United States from three pharmaceutical companies who have successfully used marketing training strategies to reduce unethical sales representative behavior. The implications for positive social change include the potential to develop strategies to reduce unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry, which in turn may lead to more trust between patients and their physicians, improving patient satisfaction, and promotion of prosperity for the community through enhancing the quality of health care.

Role of the Researcher

According to Yin (2018), researchers play an integral and critical role in all steps of research project. They are the main actors who manage all research steps from planning to documentation, revision, and submission (Henderson, 2018; Hoddy, 2019). The researcher is responsible for the data collection such as interviews of the target respondents (Pinkelman & Horner, 2017). I explored strategies that some sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry use to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior. I was the primary instrument in all steps of this research study (e.g., study plan, collecting and analyzing data, result interpretation, writing conclusion, and documentation). My role in this research was to propose a plan for the empirical study and then carry out the plan to complete the study. After I had the approval of the proposal from the institutional review board (IRB) at Walden University, I started collecting the data. I discussed with the participants their role in this research (e.g. answering my interview questions) and made sure they understand. I used open-ended questions to have in-depth phone interview with the participants (sales managers). Also, I collected the related documents (e.g., marketing strategies they used, articles and documents related to the marketing strategies, and memos) that participants may provide me. After the data collection, transcription of the interviews was the next step I conducted before the data analysis.

Researchers must have extensive knowledge and understanding of the topic they are discussing to ensure the quality, reliability, and validity of the study (Råheim et al., 2016). The relationship between the researcher and the researched topic must be deep to properly carry out the study and this is the reason why researchers should have the freedom to choose their topic. (Clancy & Vince, 2019; Råheim et al., 2016). In the academic setting, the professors let their students choose their topic within the limits of the program to ensure that the researchers will value their study because it has a deep connection with them or they have strong interest towards their chosen topic. Furthermore, Van den Besselaar and Sandström (2019) indicated that independence of researchers gives them greater opportunities to showcase their skills in research. Independence of researchers also promotes productivity because the researchers have their own pace in conducting their study. I have more than 5 years of experience working in the pharmaceutical industry. However, I did not make my opinion and experience working in the pharmaceutical industry affect the results of this study. In addition, I did not have any relationship with the potential participants in this study. Furthermore, I mitigated bias and avoid viewing data through my personal lens or perspective. Van Manen (2017) used epoché-reduction phenomenon to decrease bias during conducting the research. I used the same approach (epoché-reduction phenomenon) to reduce bias in my research. I had to understand the topic of the research and be conscious so my bias and knowledge did not affect the results of the research. According to Birt et al. (2016), researchers use member checking to minimize their bias. To continue to combat bias, as member checking, I sent a summary of the analyzed data to the participants to increase the accuracy and minimizing bias.

According to Arifin (2018), researchers should include ethical considerations in the research process to ensure the privacy and security of the human subjects participating in research. In this study, I treated all participants in an ethical manner and followed the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research, the Belmont Report (HHS.gov, 2016). Every potential participant who wanted to voluntarily participate in this research received the informed consent. In addition, to maintain the participants' confidentiality, I saved the data in a USB memory stick locked with a password. No one has this password except me. I keep this USB memory stick and all paper documents, including those received from participants, in my locked home office cabinet for 5 years. After the 5 years, I will destroy all data related to this research by deleting all soft copy files on the USB memory stick and shredding all hard copy papers.

Having an interview protocol helps to improve and standardize the interview processes while conducting research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I created an interview protocol (see Appendix A) that I used as road map while conducting this study. The interview protocol has information related to the interview preparation, opining the interview, how I provided the informed consent to participants, conducting the interview, theme verification, and coding. The interview protocol also includes how to proceed to ending the interview with the participants.

Participants

The target participants must be properly identified based on the prescribed research design (Saunders & Townsend, 2016). After identifying the number of participants, a researcher conducts sampling to achieve the target number of respondents. In my research, the targeted population consisted of sales managers located in the northeast region of the United States. The eligibility criteria for study participants are (a) sales managers, (b) located in the northeast region of the United States, and (c) successfully used marketing training strategies to reduce unethical sales representative behavior. Sales managers are the ones who manage the sales representatives. They have direct connection to the sales representatives who sell the pharmaceutical products to their target consumers (Levihn, U., & Levihn, 2016).

Before sales managers train their sales representatives, sales managers also undergo rigorous trainings and evaluations to determine their credibility and capabilities in leading their team (Zoltners et al., 2019). The high-level management team demands that sales managers learn and understand the courses of actions done in the field so they would know any unethical incidents occurring in the market (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2019; Demir & Min, 2019; Plank et al., 2018). Furthermore, the role of managers is vital in leading and influencing the sales representatives (Inyang et al., 2018). Therefore, it is necessary for these leaders to know how to well manage their subordinates. Leading and influencing the sales representatives justifies the need to examine the strategies performed by sales managers to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior.

Researchers selected sales managers as participants because they manage the sales representatives (Huggins et al., 2016). I selected sales managers as participants in this research because they are the ones who have extensive knowledge on the behavior and performance of their sales representatives (Cheng & Ho, 2019; Martin et al., 2018). Sales managers are also the ones who provide strategies that addresses the concerns (e.g., unethical behavior) surrounding their pharmaceutical industry. Through interviewing these sales managers, I provided a significant contribution to the understanding of the role and actions made by the pharmaceutical leaders in reducing unethical sales representative behavior.

For gaining access to participants, I searched on LinkedIn’s professional network website to find sales managers located in the northeast region of the United States. I did not have any relationship with these potential participants before sending them invitations. Then, I sent an invitation to each potential participant. The invitation included the objective of the study, the procedure of the research, and what I expect from the sales managers if they agree to participate. The participation in this study is voluntarily and no monetary compensation for participation. In case if the sales managers agree to participate, I emailed them the consent form that contains my contact information, so they can contact me for further clarifications. In addition, I arranged an introductory phone call to explain the informed consent in detail and to provide more information upon request. Establishing a working relationship with participants is critical. So, after the introductory call, I made myself reachable by phone and email to answer any further questions and to address all their concerns, if any, related to this study.

Research Method

According to Yin (2018) and Glenna et al. (2019), there are three types of research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Blaikie (2018) indicated that qualitative research method cannot justify the generalizability of its results due to a limited number of respondents and the mode of collecting data. However, according to Bansal et al. (2018), qualitative researchers collect data and derive themes from the research participants' responses. Yin mentioned that qualitative research qualitative research dwells on various lenses, ideologies, perspectives, statements, and arguments that bring new light to the phenomenon. According to Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2020) and Windsong (2018), qualitative research promotes critical engagement to the respondents to delve deeper into the phenomenon. A qualitative research method was appropriate for this study because I delved deeper into the perspectives and opinions of the sales managers and derived themes from the research participants' responses.

Researchers use quantitative research method to focus on the correlations between two or more quantitative variables (Yin, 2018). Also, in quantitative research method, researchers synthesize the data by focusing on the numbers obtained from the performance, actions, or behavior of the respondents (Stafford & Farshadkhah, 2020). According to Magruk (2015), quantitative researchers test hypotheses to examine the relationship among variables. Therefore, a quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because I did not examine the relationship among variables. According to Archibald (2016) and Yin (2018), both quantitative and qualitative methods are components of the mixed research methods. The mixed research method was not appropriate for this study because I collected qualitative data from the interview narratives to analyze and answer the research question, the use of quantitative data was just for verifying the actual success of the strategies and identifying the principal themes.

Research Design

These research designs have specific use based on the target results, research purpose and questions, as well as the data collection process (Yin, 2018). There are four primary types of qualitative research designs: case study, ethnographic, narrative, and phenomenological. (Harrison et al., 2017). I used a multiple case study design because I explored several cases (not only one case) in depth within their real-world environments. Researchers often use qualitative case study research design in social and life sciences (Heale & Twycross, 2018).

According to Baker (2018) and Yin (2018), the goal of a case study is to determine the development occurring in an individual, group of people, institution, community, or organization. According to Moriarty et al. (2019), case study, as a research design, receives various debates for its credibility and validity. However, case study research design remains to be a significant method used in conducting different kinds of research. Researchers using a case study design may not include a large number of respondents but they can provide extensive information to answer the research questions through its cases.

Case study researchers delve deeper into the situation, condition, position, and status of their cases to obtain the most significant and interesting information (Zhu, 2018). I used a case study research design to determine the development of strategies used by sales managers in reducing unethical sales representative behavior. Through a case study, I identified the perspectives of the sales managers and used their ideas for the development of strategies used to address the identified concerns in the pharmaceutical industry (i.e., unethical sales representative behavior). Furthermore, the case study paves way to understanding the possible similarities and differences of strategies used in addressing the unethical sales representative behavior.

Researchers use the ethnographical research design to collect information related to the culture (Ferraro & Andreatta, 2017). The goal of using an ethnographical design is to observe people living in a specific culture (Baskerville & Myers, 2015; Yin, 2018). I did not focus on exploring cultures, so the ethnographical design was not appropriate for this study. Another research design is the narrative. Researchers use narrative research design to focus on personal stories (Hamilton et al., 2017). The narrative research design is the appropriate one when the objective is providing a narrative context from real life stories provided by the research participants (Shapiro, 2016). I did not collect and explore life stories, so a narrative design was inappropriate for this study. Qualitative researchers use phenomenological research design to focus on the live experiences of the research participants (Nazir, 2016). Using a phenomenological research design results in providing a phenomenon derived from the live experiences of participants (Daher et al., 2017). Phenomenological design was not appropriate for my study because I did not describe the personal meanings of the participants' lived experiences.

Data saturation is time consuming, especially if new themes continue to occur during the analysis (Saunders et al., 2018). However, researchers confirm the validity of the findings through data saturation. Researchers reach data saturation when they cannot identify new themes from the analyzed data (Constantinou et al., 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It is imperative for any qualitative research to reach data saturation and ensure that there are no new themes arise from the analyzed data. In this research project, I reached data saturation through continuing the interview with the participant sales managers until there was a repetition in the information and no new information emerged.

Population and Sampling

I used the purposeful sampling method for this study. According to Duan et al. (2015), using the purposeful sampling method help in leveraging inadequate resources and selecting rich-information cases. Ames et al. (2019) indicated that researchers use purposeful sampling to narrow down the inclusion criteria when a large amount of data is available. In addition, Ames et al. provided the following steps to describe the process of purposeful sampling: (a) identification of the study population (inclusion/exclusion criteria), (b) selecting the sample size, (c) developing a sampling strategy, and (d) recruiting individuals to participate in the study. I used the same steps provided by Ames et al. to select sales managers who participated in my research.

The population of the study includes the sales managers in the northeastern region of the United States. The northeastern region includes New England (Connecticut, Main, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rode Island, and Vermont) and Middle Atlantic states (Delaware, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington DC, Virginia, and West Virginia). There are 1,182 pharmaceutical companies in the northeastern region with a minimum of five sales managers in each company (Crunchbase, 2020). Considering these numbers, there was an advantage to focus on this region and to select the target number of sales managers. The target sample size was five sales managers, from three pharmaceutical companies, who have successfully used marketing training strategies to reduce unethical sales representative behavior. According to Boddy (2016), the target number of samples depends on the acceptable sample size for qualitative research. The interview (45–60 minutes) with sales managers was over the phone to made it convenient for me and for the participants.

Ensuring data saturation, in this research, was through using the triangulation method. Triangulation is collecting data from multiple sources to have a comprehensive understanding of the topic (Khaldi et al., 2016). Triangulation is useful to reach data saturation (Turner et al. 2017; Varpio et al., 2017). Qualitative researchers use triangulation to increase the accuracy of the study finding and conclusions (Shoaib & Mujtaba, 2016). I used triangulation and collected the data from multiple sources (e.g., interviews, internet, material provided by participants, etc.). According to Yin (2018), qualitative researchers reach data saturation when no new themes develop from the data analysis. I analyzed the data after each interview to find themes that I then arranged together with data from the next interview and continued until reached data saturation. I reached data saturation after the fourth interview, yet I completed the fifth interview to confirm that data saturation occurred.

Ethical Research

Including human subjects requires ethical considerations because the researchers must ensure the privacy and security of the participants (Yin, 208). According to Naidu and Prose (2018), accountability is one of the ethical considerations in research because it ensures that the researchers are accountable for any decision that may affect the privacy and security of the participants. Kaewkungwal and Adams (2019) conducted a study and they emphasized the use of informed consent as part of ethical considerations in research. Aside from accountability and informed consent, there are also concerns pertaining to the privacy of the participants and confidentiality of the data, which I addressed in this study.

I am accountable for this research by taking all the responsibility in the research process including the sampling, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and documentation to ensure that privately and properly storage of all information provided by the participants. I emailed the informed consent form to the potential participants to ensure that they have detailed information related to the process of collecting data before deciding whether to take part of this study. The informed consent contains the objective of the study, background information, research procedures, some interview question examples, and my contact information. I scheduled an introductory call with the potential participants to explain the information available in the informed consent and to answer any questions they may had.

The potential participants had one week to make their decision if they want to be a participant in this study. During that week, I was available (by phone and email) to answer any questions related to the study. If a potential participant agreed to participate, he or she needed indicate his or her consent by responding to my email with the words "I consent." Then, a participant provided the time availability to conduct the phone interview (45–60 minutes).

I included in the interviews only the individuals who email me their consent to participate in my study. The informed consent stated that their participation in this research is voluntary and no monetary or any other forms of incentive provided for participating in this study. There are no obligations on the participant to continue the study and the participant can withdraw from the study at any time until the publication of the results. If a participant decides to withdraw from the study, they can contact me by email or phone.

In addition to the informed consent, there are several other measures that I used to assure adequate ethical protection of participants. It is important to note that research participants need to be ensured of their safety, especially in qualitative research wherein researchers use the participants’ arguments, opinions, and ideas as evidence (Famenka, 2016). Researchers should keep the identity of the participants from the data collection to the documentation of the study (Famenka, 2016). That was why there are numerous actions I executed to ethically consider the human subjects. It is critical to keep the privacy of the participants by keeping their information concealed. In the documentation process, there was no personal information included to ensure maintaining the privacy of the participants. I assigned a unique identifier to each participant. No data collection occurred before I received final permission of the Walden University’s IRB. The final IRB approval number is 05-27-20-0659768.

The next step was storing an excel sheet that linked the participant’s name and the unique identifier in a USB memory stick locked with a password. No one has this password except me. I properly stored the raw data in an encrypted file that I saved on the USB memory stick to ensure the confidentiality of the data and maintain the privacy of the participants. I keep the excel sheet (linking the participants’ names and identifiers) and the data on separate secure devices. I will keep this USB memory stick and all paper documents, including those received from participants, in my locked home office cabinet for 5 years. After the 5 years, I will destroy all data related to this research by deleting all soft copy files on the USB memory stick and shredding all hard copy papers.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection is an essential part of any empirical or experimental study because it is the process that helps to answer the research question (Tin, 2018). The data collection process determines the success of the study, which means that researchers must execute proper considerations to achieve the target response and provide the preferred result. According to Pinkelman and Horner (2017), the researcher is responsible for the data collection process such as interviewing participants in research study and collecting more data from other multiple sources. I was the primary investigator and the primary data collection instrument in this research. The data collection process included reviewing the company documents and reports provided by the participants (e.g., marketing strategies and memos) and semistructured interviews over the phone with five sales managers of the three pharmaceutical companies in the northeast region of the United States.

Researchers aim to delve deeper into the phenomenon through the subjective perspectives and arguments of the respondents (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). I asked questions that delved into the subjective perspectives and arguments of the participants. Semistructured interview is one of the common data collection instruments used in qualitative research (Yin, 2018). Researchers use semistructured interviews and rely on open-ended questions to have in-depth discussion with the study participants and gather detailed information about the topic of interest (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Nascimento et al., 2018). Through an interview, the respondents think that their ideas, opinions, sentiments, and perspectives are valued because the researchers listen to their arguments and comments related to the phenomenon (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019). However, it is imperative to create an interview based on the purpose of the study (Arsel, 2017). This means that the questions are solely based on the topic.

In this study, I focused on the purpose of the study by asking the interview questions listed in Appendix B. The questions are based solely on being ones where the answers are intended to answer the research question. In addition, I asked appropriate follow up or probing questions that helped to have more clarification and to reach data saturation. For each question, I made sure to give enough time to the participant to respond. It is critical to follow the interview protocol (see Appendix A) in order to standardize the interview process. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) contains information related to interview preparation, opining the interview, conducting the interview, and ending the interview.

Researchers enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process through member checking (Yin, 2018). According to Thomas (2017) and Britton et al. (2017), qualitative researchers use member checking (sending a summary of the analyzed data to the research participants) to confirm accuracy with each participant. I sent a summary of the interview's data analysis to each participation, so he or she could review, add, or change, and confirm the analysis and to enhance the study's validity.

Data Collection Technique

I collected the data by conducting semistructured interviews. According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), researchers use a semistructured interview as a data collection technique in qualitative research. Using semistructured interviews has the advantage of not having standardized script so the researchers use these interviews to collect in-depth information from the study participants (Yin, 2018). Another advantage is the opportunity to ask probing questions during the interview to collect more information related to the topic (Goodman-Delahunty & Howes, 2016). When the interviewer express opinions without limitations, the study participants are willing to develop a professional relationship with interviewer (Smith & Sparkes, 2017; Yin, 2018). However, there are several disadvantages of semistructured interviews including that they are time consuming because it is an in-depth interview and I have to give each participant sufficient time to respond to each questions. Furthermore, the researcher needs to have proper skills and understanding of interviews process to conduct an effective interview (Smith & Sparkes, 2017). I ensured that I had the required skills (by training) and understanding the interview process to be able to conduct effective interviews with the participants.

Following the interview protocol (see Appendix A) was critical to have uniformity during the interview process, before, during, and after the interview. According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), there are four steps for the data collection technique (a) interview questions, (b) discussion based on queries related to the research, (c) collecting feedback on the protocol, and (d) conducting a pilot study of the interview protocol. I used the first three steps and ensured that my interview protocol met the requirements of the IRB at Walden University.

Before the interviews, it was critical to ask the potential participants to sign the informed consent that includes the information about the research. The informed consent has information related to the objective of the study as well as the participants’ contribution to the research. The informed consent also includes the procedures of carrying out the data collection, which includes using a recorder as well as my I-phone as back up of the phone interview with the participants. According to Yin (2018) and Dankar et al. (2019), researchers are responsible to respect the study participants and protect their right by providing an informed consent. I conducted the interview only with participants who signed the informed consent.

After receiving the participant’s signed informed consent by email, I asked the participants for their preferred time and date availability for the phone interview. I made the necessary adjustments based on the participants’ availability to obtain the data. However, the date must be within the interview period within one week after receiving the informed consent to ensure that my timetable of the research remains consistent. I conducted interviews based on the participants’ preferred date and time for their convenience and comfortability. It was essential to consider the comfort and convenience of the participants for them to provide quality information during the interview.

There were six interview questions to answer during the interview (see Appendix B). The interview questions revolve around marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior, the framework to develop and implement ethical marketing training, assessing the effectiveness of marketing training strategies, and the key challenges in the implementation of ethical marketing training. I asked probing questions to gather more information from the participants. According to Goodman-Delahunty and Howes (2016) and Yin (2018), qualitative researchers ask probing questions during the interview to obtain more information related to the subject matter of interest.

The informed consent includes examples of the interview questions to help the respondents consider their answers beforehand. The target time of the interview was between 45 and 60 minutes, but I gave the respondents sufficient time to respond to each question and provided quality information. At the end of each phone interview, I thanked the participant for taking part in my study. After analyzing the collected data, I conducted member checking by emailing a summary of the results to the participants and asking for each person’s input. Using member checking helps to generate more data and increase the validity of the study (Britton et al., 2017).

In addition, I used the data triangulation method and collected the data from multiple sources (interviews, documents and reports provided by participants, interview analysis, and member checking). The triangulation method helps to have more extensive information related to the subject matter (Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers use the triangulation methods to help reach data saturation (Yin, 2018). However, Glasper and Rees (2016) indicated that collecting data from several sources makes the research process complicated. Moreover, confusion may result from reliance on multiple sources to collect the data (Glasper & Rees, 2016). Therefore, qualitative researchers analyze the data separately and then synthesize the data to identify the data similarities and differences (Glasper & Rees, 2016). I conducted a systematic approach in collecting data from multiple sources. After that, during the analysis, I identified the similar themes that are related to my study.

Data Organization Techniques

Yin (2018) indicated that qualitative researchers collect the data, from the study participants, and organize the data to prepare it for the next step, which is data analysis.

According to Broman and Woo (2018), data organization is an essential step before performing the accurate data analysis. Data organization is important because it allows determining any gap that might have occurred in the data collection (Broman & Woo, 2018). The most significant aspect of data organization is the ability of the researcher in transcribing all the data or responses of the participants (Yin, 2018). From the recorded file, I transcribed the data into sentence or paragraph form in spreadsheets.

The next step was organizing the data by respondent answer to the questions, creating a detailed information, and providing a general view of the similarities and differences of the participants' responses. I used NVivo® 12 to organize the collected data. According to Houghton et al. (2016), qualitative researchers use NVivo® 12 to organize and track the data which help in the next step, which is data analysis. After data organization and coding, I highlighted the themes to identify any similar ideas shared by the respondents.

Appelbaum et al. (2018) indicated that researchers should keep the research related records and documents for at least 5 years. I stored all raw data securely in a in a USB memory stick locked with a password. Then, I will keep this USB memory stick and all paper documents, including those received from participants (e.g., informed consents in case if I print them), in my locked home office cabinet for 5 years.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is the next step after the data organization. Data analysis in qualitative research design is far different from quantitative research. Unlike quantitative research wherein the prevalence of the case depends on numbers, the focus in qualitative research is on the themes or quality of the information obtained from the participants

(Simpson & Wilson-Smith, 2017). Some qualitative researchers examine the participants' points of view as they share their knowledge and experience related to the topic (Kozleski, 2017; Scharp & Sanders, 2019).

I used triangulation during data analysis to validate the interview data with document data. Considering that I employed the qualitative research design, the most appropriate data analysis method is thematic analysis. Theme development is essential in qualitative research because researchers determine the relationship of the participants' responses (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The opponents of qualitative research argue that thematic analysis does not pass the trustworthiness criteria because the responses are subjective rather than objective (Nowell et al., 2017). However, qualitative researchers use the thematic analysis to present valuable information on the situations experienced by the study participants as they deal with the phenomenon (Oliveira et al., 2016; Yin, 2018).

Through similar ideas and themes, I identified the prevalence of the situation, which justified the purpose of the study (i.e., exploring strategies that some sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry use to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior). I focused on the key themes and searched to find literature related to these themes. I correlated the key themes with the literature (including new research published since writing my study proposal) and the conceptual framework.

After installing NVivo® 12 program on my Windows laptop, I followed Yin's (2018) logical and sequential process for the data analysis of the case study qualitative research. I started analyzing the data by compiling the relevant collected data from multiple sources (interviews, documents and reports provided by participants). Then, the next step was to disassemble data into separate categories. After that, I started data coding and grouped the data into identifiable themes. The next step was interpreting the data. The final step of data analysis was determining the conclusion.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

The best way to address the issue of reliability is by conducting a follow-up of the existing research to justify its consistency (DuBois et al. 2018; Matheson, 2019). In this study, I promoted reliability by providing all the steps in conducting the research. Therefore, interested researchers can replicate the study and justify its reliability. This process can serve as a follow-up research to show that I offered justifiable data that other researchers can use in studying the issues in the pharmaceutical industry, particularly the unethical behavior of sales representatives and the strategies used by sales managers in addressing these problems. Furthermore, the study is reliable based on dependability.

Dependability

A research is dependable if other researchers can replicate, audit, and critique the research process because of its complete structure, discussion, illustration, and analysis. Moon et al. (2016) defined research dependability as the consistency and reliability of the research findings and documenting the research procedures, which allowing someone outside the research to follow, audit, and critique the research process. By looking at that definition, Moon et al. explained that dependability justifies the reliability of the study through identification of consistency based on the discussion of the research procedures, which give other researchers the interest to replicate the research process. In this study, I ensured its dependability by providing all the research processes conducted (e.g., data collection sampling, and data analysis).

Member checking is a critical tool to confirm the accuracy of the research (Thomas, 2017). Researchers use member checking and send a summary of the analyzed data to the participant to generate more data and to confirm the accuracy of the research results (Britton et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers improve the study dependability by using member checking. In this study, I used member checking and sent a summary of the results to each participant for review. Applying member checking in this research increased its dependability.

Furthermore, I presented the ethical considerations to ensure proper communication in recruiting participant and conducting the research. Also, it was critical to show how I selected the samples and managed the research before, during, and after the interview. Other researchers can use these procedures in replicating this study and expanding the discussion to obtain more information on the topic.

Validity

A research is valid if the process of conducting a research depends on the standards promoted by the research design, as well as the researchers that examine the procedures done in the investigation (Cypress, 2017). The proponents of quantitative research argue that it is difficult to validate a qualitative research because there is no fixed result. However, it is important to note that "to validate means to investigate, to question, and to theorize, which are all activities to ensure rigor in a qualitative inquiry" (Cypress, 2017, p. 258). According to Yin (2018), it is critical for researchers to focus on the validity of their study. Validity in qualitative research refers to the ability of reflecting the participants’ responses (Yin, 2018). I investigated through interviews, provide a research question, present a theoretical framework, and establish reliable data collection and analysis methods. These processes justify the validity of the study and strengthen the obtained results from the investigation. Despite the subjectivity of results, the research remains to be valid because of the consistent and accurate procedures done to obtain the required data (Yin, 2018). This section includes credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation because these parts make up validity in qualitative research.

Credibility

Research bias determines the credibility of the study (Yin, 2018). Credibility is crucial in the establishment of the study validity. Some researchers demonstrate disputed credibility because of their personal values, perspectives, preconceptions, and ideologies instilled in the research. These issues must be avoided to ensure that the study is free from any researcher bias, especially for qualitative research (Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers should avoid their preconceptions, personal beliefs, and ideologies while analyzing the data to avoid bias (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I made sure my view did not affect the research process from collection of the data to interpreting the results and writing the conclusion. I used the triangulation method and collected the data from multiple sources (interviews, documents and report provided by participants, and member checking). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), qualitative researchers use data triangulation to merge information collected from many sources.

To ensure the credibility of qualitative research, feedback must be considered (Thomas, 2016). After analyzing the collected data, I used member checking by sending a summary of the results to the participants and requesting a response detailing any changes they think I should include in the results, I requested a response from them within 5 to 7 business days. According to Britton et al. (2017), researchers use member checking to confirm the accuracy of the research results. Also, I augmented any additional, appropriate data provided by member checking to increase the study credibility.

Transferability

One of the significant goals of any empirical research is to contribute to the research literature and fill the gaps in research (Yin, 2018). However, this is not the sole purpose of any research that includes human subjects as sources of evidence. One of the reasons why researchers conducting empirical studies need to provide a clear and detailed discussion of sampling, data collection, and data analysis is for transferability (Yin, 2018). Transferability is the process of transferring the procedure to the setting of the researchers who try to replicate the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). It is critical for researchers to maintain transferability of their research to other settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interested researchers should be able to transfer the procedure to similar situations or contexts to enhance the study validity (Yin, 2018). Nonetheless, researchers must not wait for other interested researchers to transfer the procedures and findings in the study to prove its transferability. I made sure to include all important procedures and findings in the documentation to ensure that other interested researchers can easily transfer them into their own situation, research, or discussion. By providing clear discussion of this study methodology, I ensured the study transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is one aspect of validity (Mohajan, 2017). Confirmability refers to ensuring that the findings depend on the statements shared by the participants rather than the personal opinions and thoughts of the researcher (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017; Yin, 2018). Researchers establish confirmability by reducing their bias in the discussion of findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). One of the issues considered in qualitative research is researcher bias because the data is subjective, which the researchers can change to provide their preferred findings (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). Researchers using epoché-reduction phenomenon to decrease bias during conducting the research increase the confirmability of the study (Van Manen, 2017). I used epoché to decrease bias and increase the confirmability of this study. With the issue of bias, it is necessary for me to separate my personal views and beliefs from the result of this study (Yeomans, 2017). Additionally, I used member checking to enhance the confirmability of this study.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is time consuming, especially if new themes continue to occur during the analysis (Saunders et al., 2018). However, researchers confirm the validity of the findings through data saturation. Researchers reach data saturation when they cannot identify new themes from the analyzed data (Constantinou et al., 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It is imperative for any qualitative research to reach data saturation and ensure that there are no new themes arise from the analyzed data. In this research project, I reached data saturation through continuing the interview with the participant sales managers until there was a repetition in the information and no new information emerged.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 includes the purpose statement, role of the researcher, and information related to selecting participants for this study. Also, I provided a detailed discussion focused on research method and research design. After that, I presented information related to population and sampling. The population and sampling include the inclusion criteria in selecting the participants of this study. The ethical considerations include information related to maintaining the privacy of the participants and confidentiality of the data in this study. The discussion on the data collection include a detailed illustration of how I collected the data. Then, I discussed the procedures during and after the interview. I ensured the clarity of the study methodology to encourage interested researchers to replicate the study and strengthen the arguments presented in this research. For the data analysis, I conducted thematic analysis using a computer program software (NVivo® 12). Then, I mentioned the method to ensure reliability and validity of this study.

Section 3 includes the finding of this study and application to professional practice. Then, I present implications for social change and my recommendation for action. After that, I provide a discussion that covers my recommendations for further research, reflections, and the study conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some sales managers in the pharmaceutical industry use to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior. The collected data include information derived from sales manager interviews, documents, and memos provided by sales managers at three pharmaceutical organizations in the northeast region of the United States. I used the general theory of marketing ethics (including utilitarian and deontological factors or assessments) as a lens through which to explore strategies to improve marketing training for ethical marketing to reduce unethical behavior of sales representatives in the pharmaceutical industry. Findings were consistent with the general theory of marketing ethics. According to Gawronski and Beer (2017), individuals rely on utilitarian (intentional) or deontological (judgmental) factors in forming their ethical response to an action. Sales managers reported many strategies to reduce unethical sales representative behavior. These strategies include developing ethical standards, developing organizational policy, and having ethical training and development programs.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this study was what strategies do sales managers use to improve marketing training for their pharmaceutical company representatives to reduce unethical behavior? The collected data included recorded semistructured interviews with five participants who were sales managers with successfully used marketing training strategies that reduced unethical sales representative behavior. These sales managers located in the Northeast region of the United States from three pharmaceutical companies. Each sales manager answered my six interview questions and other probing questions during the interview. After the data transcription and data analysis, I used member checking by sending a summary of the analyzed data to the participants and requesting a response detailing any changes they think I should include in the results.

Using triangulation was critical in this study. So, I collected the data from multiple sources (e.g., interviews, documents and memos provided by the sales managers). After interviewing the fifth participant, I recognized that I reached data saturation because no new themes emerged. I used the computer software program, NVivo 12, to analyze the collected qualitative data. There were five steps for thematic analysis (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) data interpretation, and (e) conclusion. These are the same five steps that Yin (2018) used for thematic analysis. Three themes emerged (see Table 1) and subthemes under each theme. I discussed each theme and subthemes in the findings.

Table 1

Strategies Implemented To Reduce Unethical Sales Representative Behavior

Strategy	Percentage of use by participants (sales managers)
Developing ethical standards	100%
Developing organizational policy	100%
Training and development programs	100%

Theme 1: Developing Ethical Standards

According to Sridhar and Lyngdoh (2017), relational selling behaviors and sales performance are significantly influenced by ethical selling. In agreement with Sridhar and Lyngdoh, P4 stated, “Ethics defines the relationships and operations of the pharmaceutical industry and its practitioners.” P4 further mentioned that managers perceived many sales force personnel to have innate weaknesses that revolve around ethical issues. Sridhar and Lyngdoh found that the flow of information is an indispensable aspect of ethical selling behavior. Sridhar and Lyngdoh defined flow of information as the state of complete engagement in an activity by an individual to the extent that they ignore everything else. I reviewed the training manual from P1, P3, and P4’s companies, which contained information about ethic and salespersons’ behavior to validate the interview data. P1 was emphatic when this report was given: sales people may coddle unethical behavior owing to internal pressures of minimal supervision and having to meet sales quotas. P1 indicated, “Developing ethical standards is critical in all pharmaceutical companies to reduce unethical behavior.” P1 further mentioned that ethical standards should include the boundaries of communicating and building relations with external stakeholders during the process of marketing and selling such a product.

All interviewed participants developed ethical standards to promote ethical behavior through a strong influence on the salesperson. P3 indicated that influencing sales representatives helps in motivating them to maintain ethical measures at the workplace. P3 was consistent with Miska et al. (2016) who explained that organizational influences through ethical standard determined ethical behaviors. Therefore, managers at pharmaceutical companies can minimize unethical sales representatives’ behavior by addressing the ethical concerns and related organizational influences that affect their sales personnel. Malik et al. (2019) explained,

> Ethical activities comprise an active engagement in literacy programs targeting the medical community to influence the physicians' prescription behavior to improve sales. However, one of the obligations on sales representative in the pharmaceutical industry is to adhere to the code of ethics. (p. 246)

Malik et al. further noted that, having a code of ethics is critical while communicating and building the relationship with physicians during the pharmaceutical marketing. In this study, three subthemes emerged from the strategy of developing ethical standards (see Table 2).

Table 2

Subthemes in Developing Ethical Standards

Subthemes in developing ethical standards	Percentage of use by the pharmaceutical company
Communication	100%
Building relationship	100%
Marketing and selling products	100%

Communication

P2 stated, "Ethical communication between stakeholders arise important in every business." P2 mentioned that communication is a critical method in promoting and complying with the ethical standard of the business. In addition, all participants in this study agreed that communication is vital and helps to engage stakeholders in the business' code of ethic. Katamba et al. (2016) indicated that managers use key performance indicators to show how the adoption of a business code of ethic and conduct is essential in registering commercial feasibility void of any immoral practices. Katamba et al. further mentioned that poor communication of the business code of ethics and conduct creates intentional rebellion from the stakeholders, specifically the staff. Excellent communication of the ethical standard generates universal acceptance and creates strategic competitiveness, reputational improvement, and increased probabilities of winning cross-border collaboration among concurring pharmaceutical players (Katamba et al., 2016).

Shaw and Whitey (2016) asserted that managers at companies in the dynamic business environment anticipate ethical standards and greater transparency. The participants in the interview concurred that communicating effectively with stakeholders increases their trust and confidence in the business and helps in compliance with ethical standards. In addition, the participants mentioned that effective communication with stakeholders can create transparent and ethical business environments that there is an increasing trend towards stringent regulations that demand the detachment of commercial from medical activities in pharmaceutical businesses. P4 indicated that separating commercial and medical activities could be a requirement in some pharmaceutical companies towards maintaining a code of conduct and ethics in fulfilling medical activities to match regulatory requirements. However, P4 mentioned that effective communication should help remedy unethical inclinations of staff in undertaking these medical activities.

According to Min et al. (2017), communication with stakeholders is part of the corporate social responsibilities (CSR) initiatives conducted in pharmaceutical companies. P5 mentioned that the CSR involves communication with the stakeholders of a business to update them on corporate activities and events and the extent to which the business is socially responsible to its internal and external stakeholders. P5 mentioned that maintaining ethical standards embarking on transparency and greater ethical foundations in communication with stakeholders provides a clear picture of the organizational goals and contributes to controlling unethical behavior of staff (sales force). P5 stated, "Transparent communication delivers business's objectives to stakeholders to achieve social, environmental, and economic goals." P5 is consistent with the triple bottom line mentioned by Min et al.'s study that is comprised of social, environmental, and economic strategies that are in play to ensure managers manage the business to produce an overall positive effect.

Building Relationships

According to Kazadi et al. (2016), building relationship with stakeholders has been associated with creating benefits in pharmaceutical industries such as, exceptional knowledge bases and resources. Kazadi et al. further indicated that stakeholder theory relates to the development of organizational relationships with multiple stakeholders. The participants in this study indicated that the high management teams at the organizations remained informed about stakeholders' concerns and integrated some stakeholders in the decision-making processes. Kazadi et al. explained by saying that

> Stakeholders stand as valuable sources of exceptional knowledge during the innovation process. The stakeholders remain the locus of the firm's innovation

> and innovation networks couple diverse aptitudes, knowledge, and resources which are not necessarily available through market transactions. (p. 3)

Kazadi et al. further noted that, increasing complexity of products and services demands the input of stakeholders to drive a firm's capacity to manage its innovation networks and subsequently improve its creativity and overall outcomes. P1 stated, "Building relationships with stakeholders is critical and it should be based on ethical standards." P1 further mentioned that through building relationships, stakeholders have the opportunity to suggest ethical standards to be incorporated in innovation processes which may help to minimize immoral practices among the employees.

Franco-Trigo et al. (2019) mentioned that building relationships and stakeholder involvement optimizes promoting the integration and acceptability of new health services as well as health planning. P5 asserted that collaboration with stakeholders facilitates the overcoming of challenges associated with community pharmacy services. All participants in this study confirmed that building relationships and active participation of stakeholders in key organizational processes could help to maintain an ethical sales force in pharmaceutical companies. In addition, Lorenzini et al. (2017) found that building relations, long-term ailments, and engagement with stakeholders are valuable aspects in driving innovative packaging solutions in the pharmaceutical industry. Building relationships with stakeholders can help mitigate problems arising in packaging and health care services (Lorenzini et al., 2017). Stakeholders can also contribute to environmental aspects like user-friendliness and CSR, both elements of ethics (Lorenzini et al., 2017).

Marketing and Selling Products

Many researchers focused on ethical and unethical behavior in developed countries and fairly highlighted the plight of these issues in emerging economies especially in the pharmaceutical sector (Skandrani & Sghaier, 2016). Haque et al. (2019) mentioned that patient-centric marketing strategies are increasingly used by managers at pharmaceutical manufacturers to target medical practitioners prescribing medicines for patients. Because patients are at the core of the health care system, 100% of participants in this study agreed that ethical standards in marketing strategies, adopted by managers at pharmaceutical companies, are an important aspect of ethical behavior. Javed and Ilyas (2018) showed that presence of unethical standards in pharmaceutical-based marketing strategies influenced patient satisfaction. P2 stated, “Marketing mix strategies of pharmaceutical companies comprise various communication channels such as, the use of electronic, mass, and print media as well as e-Detailing through literature.” P2 explained that marketing communications of pharmaceutical companies are strictly regulated but recent trends show a rise in unethical marketing practices among sales representative in the pharmaceutical industry.

However, P1 indicated, “The religious core-values of the managers as well as sales representative could have impact and influence on the process of marketing and selling to make it ethical.” According to Haque et al. (2019), some religions endear ethical considerations in patient-centric marketing strategies. Haque et al. revealed that ethical standards in marketing enhance the health care service provider’s reputation. Participants in this study said that prioritizing patient satisfaction through ethical marketing strategies and communications translates to increased market share and use of service. Fatima (2017) indicated that

> In the era of increasing competition among organizations, differentiation through customer-centric and ethical selling is a plus. Sales personnel need to engage honest actions that foster lasting relationships with customers and promote customer trust and satisfaction with the marketing communication applied. (p. 69)

Fatima further noted that, marketing management should perceive the corporate social audit as a chance to show its concern for the safeguarding of consumer rights. The high management team can remove uncertainty surrounding the marketing function by monitoring, assessing, prescribing marketing processes, and creating a marketing-centric ethics code (Fatima, 2017).

Kadic-Maglajlic et al. (2019) mentioned that an ethical organizational climate improves the optimistic impacts of the industrial ambiance on customer orientation. Ethical marketing fosters ethical organizational climates that embody truth and ethics when targeting customers (Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2019). Interviewed participants in this study concurred that ethical marketing and selling create an industrial climate that positively impacts the organization’s reputation. The utilitarian perspective implies that ethical actions are those that achieve the greatest good for the largest number of people (Skandrani & Sghaier, 2016). Ethical marketing strategies have multidimensional benefits for pharmaceutical industries, companies, practitioners, and customers (Skandrani & Sghaier, 2016). All participants agreed that ethical marketing and selling standards reduce unethical sales representative behavior in the pharmaceutical industry.

Theme 2: Developing Organizational Policy

Mehralian et al. (2018) indicated that organizations with the ability to create and amass knowledge according to organizational policy can sustainably compete. According to Mehralian et al., pharmaceutical companies have all the characteristics accredited to knowledge-based firms and managing knowledge in the industry is an important aspect that contributes to organizational performance. Huang et al. (2017) asserted that organizational implementation of ethical policies is a critical factor in realizing registration and reporting of outcomes in clinical trials.

Huang et al. (2017) indicated that managers at pharmaceutical companies are providing access to raw data in order to elevate the transparency of their clinical trials. Huang et al. mentioned that policy embodies ethics and affords the stakeholders an opportunity to scrutinize the full compliance of the data and its presentation with the ethical code of conduct. Beck-Krala and Klimkiewicz (2017) explained,

> Due to increasing concerns related to unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry, organizations should have organizational policy to limit unethical behavior. GlaxoSmithKline is an example of a pharmaceutical company that has designed an organizational policy to reduce unethical behavior, improved work processes, efficient resource consumption, and financial savings. (p. 48)

Beck-Krala and Klimkiewicz further noted that, organizational policy is valuable to ensuring that sales representative in pharmaceutical companies perform their duties within ethical bounds.

P5 stated, “Organizational policy goes hand in hand with ethical standards in such organizations.” P5 indicated that organizational policy includes information that is crucial to reduce unethical behavior. P5 further mentioned that organizational policy represents facets of information that managers should share in an organization. I reviewed policies from P5's company regarding organizational policy to validate the interview data. In addition, all participants observed that organizational policy assuming the addition of intellectual capital on ethics improving the ethical position of the business and employees. Three subthemes emerged from the strategy of developing organizational policy (see Table 3).

Table 3

Subthemes in Developing Organizational Policy

Subthemes in developing organizational policy	Percentage of use by the pharmaceutical company
Preventing bribes and kickbacks	100%
Handing financial transactions	100%
Regulating activities	100%

Preventing Bribes and Kickbacks

Managers at pharmaceutical businesses considerably depend on aggressive marketing strategies to obtain the loyalty of patients and physicians, which at times embodies corruption (Peltier-Rivest, 2017). Therefore, there is a need to adopt counter strategies ranging from using transformational leadership in employee help programs and appraising performance goals associated with sales to providing certified employee training on important company policies and antibribery laws (Peltier-Rivest, 2017). P4 stated, "It is very important to prevent all types of corruption including bribes and kickbacks." P4 further added that instituting suitable anticorruption controls (separating the sales function from the marketing division), encouraging whistle blowing and an open-door policy, evaluating corruption risks linked to having business operations in poorly performing regions, and sensing common corruption plots helps an organization promote ethics in business dealings with physicians and clients.

Mackey et al. (2018) mentioned that health-sector corruption has created a menace in the industry through inhibiting access to safe and effective medicines, quality health services, and destabilizing systems targeting financial risk safeguards. Mackey et al. mentioned that corruption slows progressive efforts aimed at realizing universal health coverage. The World Health Organization estimated that close to U.S. $415 billion was lost in health care abuse and fraud in 2008 (Mackey et al., 2018). All interviewed participants said that organizational policy targeting corruption should facilitate ethical behavior among practitioners and employees (i.e., sales representatives).

Researchers showed that corruption in health care has more than financial impact and associates with a detrimental effect on individuals' status quo and poorer health (Mackey et al., 2018). P2 mentioned that many aspects make the health care industry a corruption zone such as, sophistication of country-specific health care systems, the internationalized nature of the health care supply chain, and information asymmetries that can result in slackened decision-making. P2 indicated that internationalization of the health care system increases the number of corruption access points. Participants in this study agreed that instituting corruption free environments (penalties) could help discourage organizational corruption. The participants mentioned that stakeholder should engage in fostering collaboration with industry players to mitigate the causes of corruption.

P3 stated, “Formalized payment structures can help reduce corruption.” P3 also mentioned the importance of implementing tight controls on payment methods and procedures to ensure that managers handle medical finances effectively and accountably. Implementing safer procurement and delivery procedures could also help prevent kickbacks and bribes. P1 added, “Limiting supply chain intermediaries is a step towards mediating risks associated with long supply chains and bureaucratic procedures.” According to David-Barrett et al. (2017), third-party certification is another positive commitment towards fighting health care corruption. Third-party certifiers like the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Association (IFPMA) are global institutions whose commitment lies in promoting and supporting voluntary ethical principles and practices in the pharmaceutical industry (David-Barrett et al., 2017). All participants agreed that organizational policy which embeds anticorruption policies could also help reduce sales representative and practitioner-based unethical practices in the pharmaceutical industry.

Handing Financial Transactions

Witchey (2019) highlighted how managers at the health care sector can improve transactions using validation systems. Witchey presented a block chain method of handling financial transactions in the health care sector and found that conducting financial transactions should include corresponding health care parameters such as, clinical evidence, results, outputs, and inputs among other criteria. Validation systems help to establish a transaction’s validity through the proof-of-work principle. Participants in this study mentioned that validation systems help to foster transparency of financial health transactions thus ensuring minimal unaccountability of the system. The participants also mentioned that validation systems help in generating coordinated data of a patient by incorporating the patient's history in the block chain. The participants further indicated that managers can use level of coordination and responsibility to prevent unethical practices among the sales force in the pharmaceutical industry.

Nunoo (2019) suggested an Enterprise Resource Planning System (ERPS) for handling transactions. In Nunoo's study, the use of an all-encompassing ERPS is the key to reducing inefficiencies and optimizing business performance. Nunoo also showed that the appropriate implementation of an ERPS ultimately increases business performance and directly controls the optimization of revenue and sales in pharmaceutical companies. Nunoo further asserted that the ERPS can provide important information to senior management team that is comprehensible and applicable when formulating strategic decisions to improve the performance of the business. Hassan and Daud (2017) posited that eco-organization is an important facet of eco-innovation. Hassan and Daud defined eco-organizational innovation as the upgrade of business's management processes through novel eco-methods in the firm's practices. Eco-organization is linked with enhancing corporate performance through enhancing employee and workplace satisfaction levels, sustaining critical changes, reducing suppliers' costs, and minimizing transaction and handling cost (Hassan & Daud, 2017). P1 stated, "The use of transaction handling methods and systems can significantly reduce unaccountability and the loss of critical patient information." P1 further mentioned that transaction handling methods and systems also improve ethical working by motivating responsible behavior among employees concerning handling of patient and miscellaneous transactions in pharmaceutical companies.

Regulating Activities

Researchers showed that there are many activities between physicians and employees (e.g., managers, sales representatives) at pharmaceutical companies (Lotfi et al., 2016). P3 stated, "The main benefits of activities between physicians and sales representatives at pharmaceutical companies are rewards for services." P3 further mentioned that physicians in the pharmaceutical industry require motivation to perform beyond expectations.

P4 indicated that physicians showed a positive appreciation and approval of these conferences that managers at pharmaceutical companies' sponsor. However, P4 mentioned that managers regulate conferences and other activities (through organization policy) to reduce unethical behavior. All participants in this study agreed that knowledge gained through conferences and stringent policies against excessive interaction between sales representatives and physicians could reduce unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry. The participants also mentioned that sales representatives provided information regarding specific drugs to the physicians and used promotional tools like sending direct mails, face-to-face interactions, and offering free samples for distribution to patients. In addition, sales representatives use other activities (e.g., buying dinners, event tickets, paying for meals and vacations for families, and honorariums) to foster products during events and foster loyalty among physicians to certain products and pharmaceutical companies (Alowi & Kani, 2018). All participants mentioned that managers at pharmaceutical organizations have organizational policies that cover regulating activities between sales representatives and physicians to reduce the chance of having unethical behavior.

According to Gupta et al. (2016), establishing organizational policy allows physicians and sales representatives to know the extent of the ethics code of conduct and to align their activities that include interactions and behavior accordingly. Alowi and Kani (2018) suggested the important need to establish an organizational policy because of the scrutiny of promotional activities (seminars, sponsored travel, exclusive gifts, etc.) by sales representatives towards doctors. P2 stated, “The organizational policy should ensure that doctors and sales representatives act in the best interests of the patients and company.” P2 also mentioned that organizational policy that promotes ethical interactions between doctors and sales representatives is vital to maintaining a strong ethics code.

Theme 3: Training and Development Programs

Muddukrishna at al. (2018) indicated that training and competency levels play a key role in ensuring the effectiveness of medical staff in pharmaceutical industries. According to Muddukrishna et al., training and development are complimentary and parallel to competency levels in the pharmaceutical industries. All participants in this study said that training and development programs help employees to be more determined to apply learned knowledge and skills in daily practice. Part of this knowledge may include ethical training and conduct in the workplace. Therefore, having these training programs reduce sales representative unethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry.

Babapour et al. (2018) indicated that training provides non-technical skills like, professional ethics, negotiation skills, behavioral skills, and organizational values among others, which are relevant to increasing the effectiveness of employees in the pharmaceutical companies who are medical practitioners. However, Dhainaut et al. (2020) argued that training on the standard operating procedures remains inadequate. Dhainaut et al. mentioned that enhancing the understanding of pharmaceutical companies concerning the health care system and co-designing and co-constructing creative health solutions are components of robust training and development programs. I reviewed policies from P1, P4, and P5's company regarding maintain ethical standards when selling products. In addition, all participants indicated the importance of training and development programs in reducing sales representative unethical behavior. There were three emerged subthemes from the strategy of developing training and development programs (see Table 4).

Table 4

Subthemes in Training and Development Programs

Subthemes in training and development programs	Percentage of use by the pharmaceutical company
Training on ethical business practice	100%
Training on the standard operating procedures	100%
Building and sharpening skill set	100%

Training on Ethical Business Practice

There is an increasing trend towards the institutionalization of training programs in the pharmaceutical industry (Setia et al., 2018). Training may include an external communication cycle comprising communicating data to a suitable audience, listening to stakeholders to obtain insights, and gathering data founded on stakeholder necessities (Setia et al., 2018). P3 stated, “Stakeholder input and needs assessment is essential in the design and implementation of training program focused on ethics in pharmaceutical industries.” P3 further mentioned that education is part of the training program in such organizations. Setia et al. (2018) further indicated that advisory boards in the pharmaceutical industry promote the generation of credible educational content. This content is relevant to promoting ethical standards among industry professionals.

Sales representatives collaborate with health providers to focus on gaps in educational needs or clinical practice and improving health and wellbeing of people globally (Setia et al., 2018; Villalba, 2019). P2 mentioned the importance of the collaboration between sales representatives and physicians. P2 stated, “Collaboration can provide insight on ethics gaps in the industry and foster much needed change in the ethics code of conduct for sales representatives.” P5 stated, “Sales representatives could rely on such content to adapt their moral compasses to fit industry and business-specific requirements.” P5 further mentioned that having training on ethical business practice helps to reduce unethical behavior.

On the contrary, Chisholm (2019) posited that managers should react to educational needs of sales representative to impart necessary skills and knowledge to avoid unethical behavior. Industry requirements make imperative the development of training programs for educational provisions that impart qualities like, analytical thinking, innovation, self-direction, problem solving, and flexibility to promote industrial growth and practicality (Chisholm, 2019). These skills could help minimize unethical practices in the industry. Chisholm further suggested that disruption in health care is affecting education to adapt the industry professionals to a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world. The interviewed participants in this study concurred with developing ethics training programs to adapt medical practitioners and impart necessary competencies that effectively engage them in positively changing the industry.

P4 stated, “Dynamism in the pharmaceutical industry also demands ethical conduct when dealing with stakeholders.” P4 also mentioned that ethical business practice is critical factor to combat unethical behavior among sales representatives. Chisholm (2019) observed a need for increased training and education focus on ethics business training. This training could impart moral considerations among sales representatives to allow them to perceive the seriousness of unethical behavior issues (Chisholm, 2019).

Training on the Standard Operating Procedures

Quality management is indispensable in the pharmaceutical industry because employees need to follow standard operating procedure to comply with the regulatory requirements and to avoid unethical issues (Sharma, 2017). P2 stated, “Following standard operating procedures is mandatory for employees at pharmaceutical companies to maintain ethical business practice and credibility.” P2 indicated that sales representatives need to have quality management training to facilitate their duties. P2 also mentioned that through training on the standard operating procedures, sales representatives engage in ethical practices while communicating with physicians. Also, having a quality management system facilitates the execution of transparent, efficient, and effective structure and processes that helps to achieve consistent compliance with regulatory frameworks (Yaseen et al., 2018). Additionally, quality management systems help the managers to realize customer satisfaction, improved quality, inspection readiness, and optimized costs (Sharma, 2017).

P1 indicated that global regulators have found deficiencies in the way that some pharmaceutical companies manage quality-control, standard operating procedures, and training. P1 mentioned that there are many challenges with utilizing cross-functional data and this is considered as a primary concern related to the standard operating procedures. P1 stated, "These concerns reflect in the sales representatives of pharmaceutical companies leading to operational inefficiencies and propagating unethical conduct." Shanley (2019) mentioned that improved standard operating procedures should help to ameliorate problems in pharmaceutical companies and improve efficiency. P3 indicated that the use of digital tools help individuals to refer directly to most appropriate standard operating procedures, important data, and protocols. P3 also mentioned that training sales representatives on the use of these digital tools can help them to effectively manage reports, data, and discourage unethical conduct.

Pai et al. (2016) mentioned that personnel training for pharmaceutical industry should include training on the standard operating procedures necessary for the performance of delegated responsibilities and duties. Interviewees in this study mentioned that standard operating procedures training allowed employees to perform their duties without supervision and do so perfectly. Training on standard operating procedures also empowers employees to comply with the values of the organization during the performance of their duties. This training could help sales representatives to behave ethically as per the stated norms and standard operating procedures of a pharmaceutical company.

Building and Sharpening Skill Set

Modern medicine focuses on effective and efficient provision of services and products. In this era, the need for a competent and skilled workforce in pharmaceutical industries is ever rising. Yusuff (2018) indicated that changes in the field of pharmaceuticals focused on building the skill set of employees, deepening knowledge, and sharpening the competencies of health care practitioners. Yusuff suggested that more focus targets physicians and medical professionals are needed. These health care professionals should ensure they absorb the culture of effective and safe prescribing, consistent professional education, and logical use of medicines. Moreover, considerable attention has been paid to enhancing the quality of facilities and pedagogical strategies applicable when training health care professionals (Yusuff, 2018). This focused training has helped to endear high standards of performance and ethics in meeting their obligations.

P5 stated, “Building and sharpening skill set is meant to reduce unethical behavior of medical professionals in the fields of sales and marketing.” P5 indicated that exposure to learning opportunities continues to ensure that sales representatives engage in self-directed metacognitive practices, formulate their own learning, and promote ethical behavior. P4 mentioned that providing the opportunity to the employees to complete their graduate study (e.g., master of business administration) helped sales representatives to increase their knowledge and sharpening their wits to contribute to radical changes in training, duty performance, and practice inside the company. P4 further mentioned that building skill sets and sharpening competencies could continue to dissuade unethical practices in the pharmaceutical industry.

From 2014 to 2019, there was a rise in dialogue between global regulators and pharmaceutical manufacturers on the best ways to measure quality (Shanley, 2019). Health impact assessments (HIAs) have been studied in relation to quality assurance in health care. Green (2018) defined HIAs as tools for measuring the effect on a population's health and wellbeing of proposed policy and strategy. These tools include training and how the training impacts health workers in performing their duties and helps to maintain the quality of services offered by sales representatives and training received. P2 stated, "Through HIAs, the level of training of the sales representatives can be reviewed and appropriate suggestions made to effect necessary changes." P2 further indicated that it is possible that HIAs have an indirect impact on building the skill set and sharpening the competencies of medical professionals, which is relevant to reducing untoward behavior such as unethical behavior.

Alignment of Findings with the General Theory of Marketing Ethics

Marketing ethics is a subset of business ethics that focuses on ethical circumstances of significance to the field of marketing. In the theory of marketing ethics, Keig and Ferrell (2016) indicated that the stakeholders and prerequisites strongly influence what comprises tolerable behavioral standards in marketing processes and activities. The emphasis of this approach is concerned with how ethical principles are applicable to marketing institutions, decisions, and mannerisms. Research indicated that the theory of marketing ethics has a wide scope ranging from ethics in corporate decision-making, marketing aspects such as, product, place, price, promotion, global marketing, marketing studies, regulatory, religion, ethical codes (Keig & Ferrell, 2016) and consumer ethics, channel constraints, and product issues (Murphy, 2017). The findings in this study indicate that marketing training exemplifies ethical considerations and seeks to apply them in managing the behavior of sales representatives in the pharmaceutical industry. Participants in this study agreed that sales representatives were frequently engaged in marketing functions and events and hence uniquely positioned to behave ethically or unethically. Corruption across pharmaceutical industry and businesses indicates an urgent need for marketing ethics in training and performance of duties. Also, appropriate identification and fulfillment of training needs for sales representatives is required to influence their ethical perceptions of marketing and service functions they perform.

Similarly, Gbadamosi (2019) indicated marketing ethics from two dimensions citing scholarly works. Gbadamosi suggested the teleological and deontological ethical approaches. Gbadamosi further mentioned that deontological ethics purports that it is possible to determine what is right and wrong through referring to some autonomous ethical code or a set of predetermined values. This approach in relation to the findings shows that marketing ethics can be gained from an organization’s code of ethics or its ethical values. It is thus possible for sales representatives to rely and comply with the ethical code of conduct of an organization or its values in handling transactions, procuring medication, and selling and marketing products. In contrast, teleological ethics obtain moral obligation or duty from what is desirable or good as a necessary achievable end (Gbadamosi, 2019). This approach indicated that people, groups, or institutions have a moral duty to seek to achieve what is desirable no matter the outcomes. In the pharmaceutical industry, this symbolizes the current needs concerning ethical codes. Medical representatives should aim fulfilling their duties ethically to achieve stakeholder loyalty and build trust and confidence. Pharmaceutical companies as well should consider aligning their activities (marketing, sales, etc.) with ethical underpinnings to achieve the desired effect (more revenues and increases stakeholder satisfaction).

Applications to Professional Practice

Unethical behavior among pharmaceutical sales representatives is one of the leading causes for corruption and financial fraud in the pharmaceutical industry (Villalba, 2019). The participants in this study mentioned that it is critical to improve training to reduce unethical behavior of sale representatives. Pharmaceutical sales managers may use the results of this study to develop effective marketing training strategies to reduce unethical behavior of sales representative, which in turn may lead to improving organizational performance. According to Aziz et al. (2016), managers in the pharmaceutical industry must address unethical behavior because ethics plays a crucial role in determining the performance of any business entity. Addressing unethical behavior among the physicians, pharmacists, and pharmaceutical sales representatives resulted in increased transparency in the relationships and interactions among these professionals (Patwardhan, 2016).

Interviewed participants in this study agreed that expansion of ethical considerations and increasing stringency of regulations in this sector promises both patients and practitioners efficient delivery of services and products. The participants also mentioned that sales representatives in the pharmaceutical industry has shown great promise in managing clientele prescriptions, conditions, and needs as regards pharmaceutical products and services. Over time, the advancement of technology and marketing strategies has significantly impacted this industry. Pharmaceutical industries and companies have an array of digital tools coupled with conventional methods that facilitate the provision of safe and efficient services and products. Innovation and other activities such as co-creation with stakeholders and co-designing and co-construction of health services has seen the pharmaceutical industry move forward in procuring efficient health care and wellbeing of its dependents (Dhainaut et al., 2020). In an era of increasing diseases and pandemics, the pharmaceutical industry continues to take charge in the discovery and creation of new pharmaceutical products, their prompt and safe development, and finally the manufacture and distribution of healthy and efficient products (Siddiqui et al., 2017).

New constructs like eco-organization and eco-innovation continue to ensure that the industry remains relevant in training and deployment of human resources and products to meet patients' needs (Hassan & Daud, 2017). Many interviewed participants indicated that pharmaceutical companies keep the industry abreast with important changes through strategies in marketing ethics, training, and service provision. The participants also mentioned that developments like value-driven content creation provide a wealth of web content for sales representatives and physicians to improve health care and provide people with diverse pharma-based insights. According to Witchey (2019), technological developments like the blockchain method of handling financial transactions have expedited transactions and improved accountability in pharmaceutical companies.

New training instruments like HIAs provide scrutiny of marketing training and other training programs and help to check unethical standards in the industry (Green et al., 2018).

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may be beneficial to employees of the pharmaceutical companies, physicians, and the patients they serve. Addressing unethical behavior in the industry may enhance doctor-patient relationships and increase patient trust in the pharmaceutical industry. According to Wei and Delbaere (2015), patients have become skeptical about the drugs that their physicians prescribe because some think that representatives of pharmaceutical companies use the physicians as agents of persuasion to market their prescribed brands. Good relations and trust between health care professionals and their patients may play a significant role in enhancing the quality of health care and improving patient satisfaction (Allen et al., 2016; Birkhäuer et al., 2017; Brown & Calnan, 2016; Hanse et al., 2016).

All participants in this study agreed that training on ethical business practices has improved the quality of services provided to patients. This ensures that society is protected from unscrupulous business activities through inculcation of ethical standards in training, marketing, and duty performance. Implications from the findings indicate that ethical standards are important in promoting accountability, building stakeholder trust and confidence, and facilitating efficiency in pharmaceutical companies. Regulatory compliance also ensures that sales representatives are ethically inclined when performing their duties (Riggs et al., 2016). Studies show increasing expectations of the community towards transparency and ethical standards in a dynamic business environment as exemplified by the pharmaceutical industry (Shaw & Whitney, 2016). The IFPMA works with its member companies and country-specific associations to improve the agenda of ethical conduct and self-regulation. According to Shaw and Whitney (2016), through driving ethical considerations, the IFPMA has enabled pharmaceutical companies and industries to promote ethical strategies and standards in their operations and activities hence protecting the public's interests.

Likewise, there is a need for pharmaceutical companies to maintain ethics to assist them in providing safe and efficient health care products to patients (Dutt et al., 2018). Sustainability is a concern in the pharmaceutical industry and can solely be ensured via ethical practice. Research indicates that countries and health systems continue to struggle with providing sustainable access to required medicines at a universal level (Cernuschi et al., 2020; Vogler et al., 2018).

The participants mentioned that pharmaceutical companies can be a power for a positive social change by supporting nonprofit organizations and academic health care research through donations that bring future benefits to communities' citizens. A number of multinational pharmaceutical companies have engaged public-private alliances that aim at enhancing access to medicines to all members of a population and simultaneously generate social business (profits). However, pharmaceutical companies should be concerned with practical and alleged conflicts of interest when intervening in systems that can impact the present and future markets for their products. There is also a growing need for feasible and compelling measurements tools, metrics, and structures to facilitate the evaluation of social business interventions to improve medical circumstances (André et al., 2018). Therefore, social interventions like marketing training, ethics education, and literacy programs targeting performance of duties in pharmaceutical companies are relevant to improving the ethical angle of medical business activities. Implications from these findings support social marketing that embodies ethical standards in helping sales representatives, in the pharmaceutical industry, to behave ethically in various situations.

Social marketing seeks to benefit the universal community and target audience much less the marketer through influencing social behavior (Bakan, 2016). The study findings show that marketing training helps the sales representatives, in the pharmaceutical industry, to implement ethical and relevant marketing techniques that improve the commercialization of pharmaceutical products and services. Embedding ethical considerations in marketing training should help to minimize unethical behavior of sales representatives during professional practice. The functioning of pharmaceutical companies is multidimensional comprising doctors as prescribers, organizations as payers covering partial or complete costs of pharmaceutical products, and patients. These dimensions call for ethical standards in providing efficient services and products and limiting the effect of unethical behavior among sales representatives in the pharmaceutical industry.

Marketing training in pharmaceutical companies aims at creating lasting relationships between stakeholders and sales representatives. This training involves pharmaceutical relationship marketing that embarks on sales representatives instituting, maintaining, and enhancing relationships with consumers in support of social concerns (Enyinda et al., 2018). The social aspect of ethical principles requires keen attention from sales representatives in meeting their obligations with the public’s interests in mind. Generating the right marketing mix involves marketing training that will provide efficient and ethical tools as instruments for meeting consumers' satisfaction, motivating sales representatives, and facilitating ethical decision-making.

Recommendations for Action

Pharmaceutical companies might use the findings of this study to develop effective marketing training packages for their sales representatives. I recommend that pharmaceutical companies allocate diverse resources towards achieving ethical marketing training for their employees. I also recommend that every pharmaceutical company should identify a set of ethical standards to inculcate in their business practices to achieve universal benefits for their clientele and sales representatives. The pharmaceutical industry should engage stakeholders to validate their ethics code of conduct and assess gaps in the provision of ethical marketing training for their sales representatives and medical practitioners. It is also important for businesses in this industry to perform quality assurance checks in multiple departments to identify ethical needs in training packages and employee behavior.

Training tools could adopt perspectives such as, eco-innovation and eco-organization to improve corporate performance by enhancing employee job satisfaction levels, reducing medical transaction and handling costs, sustaining important changes, and reducing supply chain costs (Hassan & Daud, 2017; Qian et al., 2019). In addition, I also advocate for improved relationships between stakeholders and pharmaceutical companies. This could involve effective interactions comprising all-rounded communication with stakeholders, physicians, and sales representatives. Participants' awareness of ethical compliance, safeguarding, and safety is also recommended to increase ethical behavior during clinical trials and overall medical practice (González-

Saldivar et al., 2019). I also recommend that marketing training targeting pharmaceutical companies embody ethics in incentivized programs to promote an ethical culture among sales representatives. Organizational policies affecting pharmaceutical companies should constitute ethical guidelines and practices to help professionals consequently align their interactions and behavior (Gupta et al., 2016). Due to the increasing regulations in the pharmaceutical industry, pharmaceutical companies should develop training programs that help employees to increase their commitment and apply acquired knowledge in daily practices.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study findings indicate some gaps in research. The need for new models of organization and training on ethical behavior are relevant in marketing training for sales representatives. There is inadequate research on eco-innovation and eco-organization and how it impacts the actions and activities of pharmaceutical companies. This research could help enlighten how these emerging constructs influence medical processes and dimensions in the pharmaceutical industry. Furthermore, there is also limited evidence on the perception of participants in clinical trials about ethical compliance protection, and wellbeing. Research in this area could help to identify imperatives for ethical adherence among participants in clinical trials and needs that the pharmaceutical companies can fulfill. This study also identified the need to increase research on marketing training on the angle of digital tools in pharma-marketing, medical education and strategy, as well as sales function. The exponential application of digital tools in pharmaceutical marketing could lead to engage more studies on the integration of ethics in digital marketing. Hence, research must also focus on how sales practitioners can be trained on ethical digital marketing.

Future studies should also give attention to miscellaneous relations between medical professionals and pharmaceutical industry. The involvement of sales representatives in sustainable drug innovation and distribution are other areas that could be investigated. Due to sales representatives' role in many aspects, research should incorporate diverse roles of sales representatives in developing sustainable medicine supply and supply chain procedures involved. Research in this area should also address ways to solve decline in discovery and approval of new medicines. Also, research on marketing training embarking on marketing communications between sales representatives and young adults and children is long overdue. Studies in this area could help people understand how ethical marketing can be applied to ensure that children and young adults receive appropriate marketing content for objective perceptions on various medications.

Reflections

Challenging as it was, conducting a doctoral study had a positive impact on my education. The process was engaging and I found fulfillment in reviewing and assessing various scholarly materials to obtain required insights into strategies in marketing training to reduce unethical behavior among sales representatives in the pharmaceutical industry. The research process also provided a rare opportunity to engage diverse knowledge bases and information related to my study. The study process also facilitated the development of a work and study ethic by integrating planning, coordination, and arrangement of study materials. My time during the doctoral study was fulfilling and I was intrigued by the level of detail offered in the research material I used in my study. Upon reflection, I was also exposed to some time and resource constraints when conducting the interviews and documenting findings. Thematic presentation of the findings was also demanding and required an analytical review of both findings and academia to make sense of the suppositions in this study.

During the research process, I found the importance of marketing training strategies in mitigating unethical sales behavior among sales representatives to be personally refreshing. I was fascinated by the lack of ethical standards in an industry that handles directly ingested products. I also found it morally irresponsible that sales representatives and medical practitioners could engage anything other than moral precedence in servicing patients' needs. In addition, I found it interesting that there are new constructs to solving unethical behavior among sales representatives such as eco-innovation and eco-organization. Besides, the urgency of ethical marketing training in pharmaceutical companies was disappointing to discover based on past perspectives that the industry maintained high standards of ethics. This however supports my use of open-ended questions in the interviewing process to discover what participants perceived of the industry's ethical standards. Completion of this doctoral study helped me to understand the importance of adopting multiple perspectives on particular topical issues and listening objectively.

Conclusion

The findings of this study bring to conclusion that developing ethical standards is possible through communication, building relationships, and marketing and selling products. Developing organizational policy targets corruption prevention, handling financial transactions, and regulating activities. Training and development programs provide training on ethical business practice and standard operating procedures, and building and sharpening skill set. The study found there is an alignment between the findings and the general theory of marketing ethics. Ethical considerations were found to be important in the medical professional practice. The study found ethics to be indispensable aspect of modern pharmaceutical industry and to have a significant impact on social change. Ethics helps in achieving sustainability in medicine discovery, production, and distribution. The study recommends that pharmaceutical companies use the findings in enhancing their marketing training packages to realize ethics for sales representatives. There is also an urgent need to invest time and intellect towards advancing knowledge in eco-organization and eco-innovation. Other areas of interest include digital marketing training, evaluation of medical professionals’ relations with the industry, and marketing techniques directed to young adults and children.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Preparation for the interview. After having Walden University IRB approval, I will email the IRB-approved participation invitation to the potential participants. This invitation will contain information related to the back ground and the purpose of the study. If the potential participants voluntarily agree to participate in the study, I will ask them to provide their time availability (date and time) for the phone interview.

Informed consent. The informed consent form contains the objective of the study, background information, research procedures, some interview question examples, and my contact information. I will make sure the participants understand the study. And I will answer any questions related to the study.

Before the interview. Before beginning the interview, I will make sure that I received the signed informed consent from the interviewee (participant). Also, I will ensure that the time is still convenient for the participants and they are ready for the interview. Then, I will turn on the recorder and my phone to start recording the interview (for transcription purposes) and I will mention the participant's identifier number for the analysis.

Beginning the interview. I will begin all phone interviews by thanking the participants for their willingness to participate in this research. Then, I will introduce myself, describe the study objectives, and explain the benefits (from business and social perspectives) of conducting the research.

Conducting the interview. The interview will last for around 45 to 60 minutes. A semistructured interview will contain open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B). I will give the participant sufficient time to answer each question. If it is necessary, I will repeat participant’s answer to make sure that I understand, and I will ask probing and follow up questions to have more information and clarification from the participants.

Theme verification. I will identify major themes discussed during the interview and will ask participants to confirm.

Coding. I will assign a unique identifier to each participant to keep the privacy and privacy of the participants and maintaining the confidentiality of the data. I will code the first participant as P1, the second as P2, and will continue using the same numerical coding for the all other participant in this study. Then, the next step will be to keep the excel sheet that links the participant’s name and the unique identifier in a USB memory stick locked with a password. No one will have this password except me. Also, I will properly store the raw data in an encrypted file (that I will save on the USB memory stick) to ensure the confidentiality of the data and maintain the privacy of the participants. I will keep this USB memory stick in my home office cabinet for five years as it requested by Walden University.

Ending the interview. After having the answers to all my questions, I will end all interview by thanking the participants for their time. I will tell the participant that I will email them a summary of the analyzed data (from the interview) so they can review (it will take around 20 to 30 minutes of their time). And the participants respond (within 5 to 7 business days) after reviewing the summary. The participants can respond by (a) confirming the accuracy, and/or (b) providing any inconsistencies, and/or (c) providing additional information.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What training strategies do you use to improve marketing training to reduce unethical sales representative behavior?
2. What framework(s) did you use to develop and implement your ethical marketing training program?
3. How did you assess the effectiveness of your strategies for marketing training?
4. What were the key challenges to implementing your strategies for ethical marketing training elements?
5. How did you overcome the key challenges in the implementation of ethical marketing training elements?
6. What additional information would you like to share that we did not cover during this interview about the strategies to improve marketing training used to reduce unethical sales representative behavior?