

PERFORMANCE COACHING AND NEED SATISFACTION IN CUSTOMER-FACING SALES ROLES: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

Garrett HART

Marymount University, Arlington, VA, USA
gwh94945@marymount.edu

DJuan BRACEY

Marymount University, Arlington, VA, USA
d0b96358@marymount.edu

ABSTRACT

Customer-facing sales teams are increasingly managed through real-time dashboards, yet disengagement and turnover intentions are often blamed on “work ethic” or generational stereotypes. This integrative literature review uses self-determination theory to synthesize evidence on how performance coaching influences motivation, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions in high-pressure sales roles, with particular attention to early-career employees often labeled Generation Z. A systematic search and multistage screening process across major business and education databases informed a thematic synthesis organized around autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relatedness. The findings suggest that coaching is more likely to sustain effort when leaders preserve ownership within constraints, provide clear rationales for performance expectations, and avoid a purely compliance-driven tone. Coaching also appears more effective when feedback is translated into specific skill-building steps and near-term practice opportunities that make progress visible. The relational quality of coaching further shapes whether feedback is experienced as support or correction, which may influence commitment in metric-driven settings. This review advances the coaching and motivation literature by reframing “generational” concerns as a solvable need-support challenge embedded in day-to-day accountability practices. Practical implications emphasize bounded choice, development-focused follow-up, and respectful check-ins that maintain performance standards while supporting psychological needs.

KEYWORDS: autonomy support, customer-facing sales, Generation Z, performance coaching, self-determination theory

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1. Introduction

Since entering the workforce in 2013 the integration of Generation Z (Gen Z) into the workforce has created noticeable shifts in workplace dynamics, particularly in customer-facing sales roles where motivation, autonomy, and relational trust

shape performance outcomes (Leslie et al., 2021; Satoh, Mitani, Ishikane, & Kamada, 2025; Sigaeva et al., 2022). Prior literature suggests that Gen Z emphasizes meaningful work, flexibility, and supportive leadership, challenging hierarchy-driven approaches to engagement

and supervision in performance-driven settings (Sato et al., 2025; Sigaeva et al., 2022). At the same time, the issue is often framed as though Gen Z has fundamentally different psychological needs from other cohorts, when a more defensible question concerns how workplace conditions support or frustrate universal motivational processes (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Gen Z appears quicker to notice misalignment because they enter work with more explicit value-based psychological contracts and well-being expectations, have been socialized into high transparency and continuous feedback, and work within digitally mediated systems that make autonomy, competence, and relatedness supports (or failures) more immediately visible (Deas & Coetzee, 2022; Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This distinction is significant, as it shifts the managerial response away from cohort stereotypes and toward modifiable leadership behaviors and feedback practices in sales environments (Hart, 2025c; Erika et al., 2023; Nelson et al., 2021). This study focuses on Gen Z employees in customer-facing sales roles and examines how performance coaching practices relate to motivation, job satisfaction, and retention (Chillakuri, 2020; Hart, 2025b; Jayathilake, Daud, Eaw & Annuar, 2021).

Self-determination theory (SDT) provides a focused lens for examining workplace dynamics, emphasizing three basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as foundations for motivation and healthy functioning (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Rather than assuming Gen Z has different psychological needs, this study treats autonomy, competence, and relatedness as universal and considers whether Gen Z's emphasis on immediate and regular feedback shapes how need support is experienced in coaching conversations (Chillakuri, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Hart, 2025b, 2025c; Ryan &

Deci, 2020). Autonomy reflects the experience of choice and psychological freedom, which is closely tied to intrinsic motivation and the internalization of work goals (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Slemp, Lee & Mossman, 2021). Competence reflects the need to feel capable and effective, along with a sense of mastery, which is shaped through training, feedback, and opportunities to build skills in meaningful ways (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). Relatedness reflects the need for interpersonal connection and belonging, which can be strengthened or undermined through the tone, frequency, and relational quality of workplace interactions (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). Taken together, SDT suggests that the motivational challenge is the satisfaction of Gen Z's needs being more salient for them in how they interpret coaching, performance evaluation, and daily supervision (Hart, 2025b; Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

This perspective is especially relevant in customer-facing sales contexts, where strict performance metrics, continuous monitoring, and frequent feedback can either support the satisfaction of needs or create conditions experienced as controlling and disengaging (Hart, 2025c; McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Zhou, Li & Gong, 2019). Empirical work suggests that autonomy-supportive leadership and feedback are associated with stronger persistence and engagement. This aligns with the idea that the style of leadership communication matters, rather than merely the existence of standards or accountability (Hart, 2025e; Reeve et al., 2002; Slemp et al., 2018). Other evidence indicates that workplace outcomes tied to motivation and engagement remain meaningfully shaped by leadership behaviors and context, particularly in environments characterized by pressure and constant evaluation (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Zhou et al., 2019). These findings point to a practical

leadership problem that is often mislabeled as a generational issue: how organizations deliver performance coaching and feedback in ways that protect autonomy, build competence, and strengthen relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci et al., 2017).

Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to examine how Gen Z employees in customer-facing sales roles experience and interpret performance coaching and feedback through the lens of SDT, with specific attention to autonomy, motivation, and commitment (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Hart, 2025c; Ryan & Deci, 2020). SDT argues that Gen Z does not have distinct basic psychological needs compared to other generations but may be more aware of psychological needs and their satisfaction, which can intensify the organizational consequences of need-supportive versus need-thwarting leadership practices (Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Sigaeva et al., 2022). The following sections develop this SDT-based framing and connect it to engagement and retention-relevant outcomes in performance-driven, customer-facing sales environments (Erika et al., 2023; McAnally & Hagger, 2024). Although prior research highlights Gen Z's preference for clear, frequent communication and leader engagement, leader-member exchange and performance coaching have rarely been examined as mechanisms influencing Gen Z motivation, job satisfaction, and retention in customer-facing sales roles, a gap this study seeks to address (Aksakal & Ulucan, 2024; Chillakuri, 2020; Hart, 2025e; Jayathilake et al., 2021).

This article makes a synthesis-oriented scientific contribution as an integrative review. The objective is to reinterpret and consolidate an existing body of scholarship on performance coaching in customer-facing sales roles using self-determination theory as the organizing lens, then translate that synthesis into a conceptually grounded framework and clear

theoretical and managerial implications. This positioning matters because the contribution is evaluated by the clarity of the synthesis and the usefulness of the resulting framework, not by new hypothesis tests or effect-size estimates. The next sections follow that logic by defining scope boundaries, making the review procedures transparent, and then organizing the evidence into patterns tied to autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

2. Problem Statement

Harter (2024) reported that engagement among younger millennial and Gen Z employees declined from 40% to 35% at the end of 2023, indicating a sustained engagement challenge for organizations that depend on early-career talent. *“This means that...Gen Z employees have seen their engagement ratio fall from 3.1 to 2.5”* (Harter, 2024, p. 3). In customer-facing sales settings, this challenge becomes directly observable when new hires disengage, fail to meet performance expectations, or leave roles before proficiency develops (Zhou et al., 2019). SDT suggests that employees are more likely to persist when work environments support autonomy, competence, and relatedness rather than relying primarily on pressure or surveillance (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). The general problem is that many sales organizations still default to monitoring-heavy management and inconsistent coaching, which can weaken psychological need satisfaction and, in turn, motivation (Deci et al., 2017; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). Specifically, sales leaders often lack clear, real-time coaching behaviors that align daily feedback and accountability routines with SDT, even though Gen Z employees appear to value frequent communication and developmental feedback that amplifies the consequences of misaligned coaching (Chillakuri, 2020; Hart, 2025c; Jayathilake et al., 2021).

This integrative review addresses a gap in the literature by integrating SDT need-support principles with the realities of customer-facing sales roles to surface actionable coaching practices that may strengthen engagement and reduce turnover intentions (Hart, 2025e; Laiman et al., 2023; McAnally & Hagger, 2024).

3. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

3.1. SDT as the Primary Lens

SDT provides a useful foundation for this study because it explains motivation through the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). SDT also implies that these needs are not unique to any single cohort, which supports the framing of Gen Z as potentially more aware of need satisfaction rather than fundamentally different in what they require to stay motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This matters in customer-facing sales roles because coaching, performance monitoring, and constant evaluation can either reinforce psychological need satisfaction or unintentionally undermine it, depending on how those systems are implemented and communicated (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Zhou et al., 2019). Placing SDT at the center of the framework allows the study to move beyond surface assumptions about “*what Gen Z wants*” and instead examine how everyday coaching interactions are experienced as need-supportive or need-thwarting (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Olafsen & Deci, 2020).

3.2. Autonomy and How Coaching Shapes Ownership

Within SDT, autonomy refers to employees feeling in control of their decisions and experiencing a sense of choice in how they approach their work (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Slemp et al., 2021). Autonomy does not require that the task

originate with the employee, but it does require that the employee feels able to carry it through with a sense of ownership, a condition often framed as functional autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When employees experience ownership, worth, and purpose in their tasks, they are more likely to feel psychologically empowered, which appears to be linked to reduced intentions to leave (Deci et al., 2017; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). This connection is relevant for Gen Z because the literature reviewed in this chapter treats turnover among Gen Z as a meaningful concern for organizations, suggesting autonomy support may have practical value for retention in real workplaces (Olafsen & Deci, 2020). In the context of performance coaching, autonomy support is likely communicated through the tone of feedback, the extent to which employees feel heard, and whether the coaching interaction emphasizes ownership rather than compliance (Chillakuri, 2020; Slemp et al., 2018). Evidence cited in this chapter suggests that autonomy-supportive leadership can increase task persistence, reinforcing the idea that the quality of leadership communication can shape sustained effort even under pressure (Hart, 2025e; Reeve et al., 2002).

3.3. Competence, Skill Growth, and the Role of Feedback

SDT defines competence as the skills employees need to complete the tasks expected of them, viewing it as something that develops through learning rather than remaining fixed (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). As employees gain competence, they tend to experience satisfaction through effective functioning. However, this satisfaction may decline as the skill becomes routine, creating a natural pull toward new learning and continued growth (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This dynamic is important for customer-facing roles because performance expectations can

remain constant. Meanwhile, the employee's need for development continues to evolve, making coaching and training central to ensure competence needs are supported (Olafsen & Deci, 2020). Organizations can support competence by providing positive feedback and training that improve skills, which aligns closely with the intent of performance coaching as continuous support for employee development (Chillakuri, 2020; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). At the same time, this chapter recognizes a plausible tension in how Gen Z is perceived: organizations may interpret performance gaps as a lack of competence, when the underlying issue may be limited access to learning opportunities or discomfort in engaging those opportunities when other psychological needs are not being met (Olafsen & Deci, 2020). This suggests that competence should not be treated as a simple individual attribute but as an outcome shaped by coaching practices, workplace climate, and the availability of development pathways (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Olafsen & Deci, 2020).

3.4. Interpersonal Relatedness and the Social Side of Motivation

The third SDT need, interpersonal relatedness, refers to fostering meaningful connections with others and experiencing belonging and safety within a group (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). Relatedness is considered important to mental well-being and is linked to motivation, as employees who feel connected and safe within their team are more likely to remain engaged (Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020). SDT also implies that leaders play a visible role in shaping relatedness through a community of respect and care. This practice makes coaching conversations more than a technical performance tool and instead a relational mechanism that can strengthen trust or strain it (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This is especially relevant in high-pressure,

metric-driven settings where individualism can both strengthen and undermine the conditions that support relatedness, even when teamwork is still required to perform well (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019). The literature reviewed in this chapter also emphasizes that Gen Z workers respond well to clear, frequent communication and immediate feedback, suggesting that relatedness is partly experienced through the consistency and human presence embedded in coaching routines rather than through occasional formal reviews (Aksakal & Ulucan, 2024; Chillakuri, 2020; Hart, 2025e).

3.5. SDT in High-Pressure Sales Contexts and the Research Question

Although SDT is well-suited to workplace motivation, the chapter also notes that applying SDT in customer-facing sales roles can be challenging because strict metrics and performance expectations can restrict autonomy, limit opportunities to build competence, and reduce interpersonal relatedness (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Zhou et al., 2019). This tension creates a practical need for coaching strategies that balance flexibility and accountability, because high-pressure environments can undermine the very conditions that sustain intrinsic motivation and commitment (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Zhou et al., 2019). Empirical evidence cited in the chapter supports the relevance of SDT mechanisms by showing that autonomy-supportive leadership is associated with increased task persistence and autonomy-supportive feedback with improved task engagement, suggesting that how leaders coach may influence effort and involvement in measurable ways (Reeve et al., 2002; Slemp et al., 2018). Guided by SDT, this study asks how Gen Z employees in customer-facing sales roles experience and interpret performance coaching in relation to autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relatedness, and how those perceptions

connect to motivation, job satisfaction, and decisions to stay or leave (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

3.6. Integrated Framework and Research Questions

Taken together, the literature suggests that performance coaching functions as a social context that can either support or frustrate autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relatedness for Gen Z employees in customer-facing sales roles (Chillakuri, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). When coaching is experienced as autonomy-supportive and informational, employees are more likely to persist and remain engaged, consistent with evidence linking autonomy-supportive leadership and feedback to task persistence and engagement (Reeve et al., 2002; Slep et al., 2018). In contrast, sales environments characterized by heavy monitoring and constant evaluation may increase the likelihood that coaching is experienced as controlling, thereby restricting autonomy and weakening relatedness, and undermining motivation and commitment (Deci et al., 2017; McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Zhou et al., 2019). This framing implies that the critical lever is not whether standards and metrics exist, but how leaders communicate expectations and provide ongoing support so that employees experience ownership, skill growth, and belonging while meeting performance requirements (Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Because Gen Z is described as expecting immediate, regular feedback and clear communication, coaching routines may be a particularly visible area where need satisfaction – or need frustration – becomes salient and influences employee outcomes (Aksakal & Ulucan, 2024; Chillakuri, 2020; Hart, 2025e).

Guided by this framework, the study is driven by the following research questions (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). First, how do Gen Z

employees in customer-facing sales roles experience performance coaching in relation to autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Second, how are these coaching experiences associated with motivation, job satisfaction, and intentions to stay with the organization (Deci et al., 2017; Olafsen & Deci, 2020).

4. Methodology

4.1. Method for Reviewing the Literature

This literature review was conducted to identify, analyze, and synthesize research on how performance coaching influences autonomy, motivation, and commitment among Gen Z employees in customer-facing sales roles (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The review was designed to bridge theoretical and practical gaps by organizing evidence to inform leadership strategies and employee engagement practices in real-world workplace settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). A comprehensive search strategy was used to ensure breadth and depth of coverage, including keyword searches and Boolean operators to refine results. Additional strategies were used to deepen coverage, including the ancestry method, citation mining, and chain searching to create a connected network of relevant literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

Searches were conducted using academic databases, including ABI/INFORM Complete, Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Filters for peer-reviewed status and publication date were applied to strengthen relevance and quality. Historical information obtained through open Internet searching was cross-validated using scholarly databases to confirm credibility. Keywords included Generation Z, retention, and job satisfaction, with search strings tailored to performance coaching, workplace engagement, and

customer-facing sales contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

To make the review boundaries explicit, the search and screening process was limited to studies published between 2017 and December 2025, alongside foundational SDT sources used to anchor definitions and mechanisms (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci et al., 2017; Reeve et al., 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This temporal range reflects the publication window returned by the database filters and the final screening set, and it was applied consistently during title, abstract, and full-text review so that inclusion decisions were made against a stable rule rather than shifting judgment calls.

4.2. Selection Criteria, Screening, and Synthesis

A systematic process guided inclusion and exclusion to ensure alignment with the research questions and study objectives. Although the review is integrative in synthesis, its search and screening steps followed systematic procedures to strengthen transparency and replicability (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Studies were prioritized if they addressed SDT constructs or closely related workplace constructs, such as autonomy, motivation, and leadership dynamics, with emphasis on transferability to customer-facing sales roles (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Recency and scholarly rigor were treated as quality indicators, with a strong preference for contemporary, peer-reviewed work to reflect the evolving workplace expectations discussed in the chapter (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Studies with limited transferability to customer-facing sales roles were generally excluded unless they offered clear theoretical or methodological value that strengthened the review's conceptual foundation (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

The review followed a structured multistage process, beginning with an

initial screening that identified 78 articles through keyword searching and citation-based strategies (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Abstract screening narrowed the pool by removing studies outside the study's context, resulting in 26 articles that advanced to detailed analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). For clarity, exclusion decisions were made using prespecified criteria, including removal of studies outside customer-facing commercial contexts, papers treating coaching as mentoring or counseling, and leadership studies that did not include a definable performance-coaching process aligned with SDT need support mechanisms. Although coaching and motivation research is broad, the final count reflects the narrow intersection defined by this review rather than a limited search reach. Many initially relevant articles were screened out because they examined coaching in non-commercial settings, treated coaching as mentoring or counseling, or discussed leadership generally without an identifiable performance-coaching process that could be aligned with SDT need support. As a result, the 26 retained studies represent the most directly comparable evidence base for synthesizing how performance coaching may shape autonomy, competence, and relatedness in customer-facing sales roles. The full articles were then reviewed to assess methodological rigor, theoretical alignment, and relevance to the study objectives, which helped maintain consistency across the final body of literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final stage used thematic synthesis to organize the selected studies into conceptually meaningful patterns, supporting a structured integration of findings and the identification of gaps in the existing research (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This analytic approach directly supports the next section by translating the reviewed evidence into a coherent set of findings

linked to autonomy, competence, interpersonal relatedness, and coaching in customer-facing sales roles (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

5. Findings

The SDT concepts of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were established in Section 3, so the findings below do not restate those definitions. Instead, this section concentrates on where the reviewed studies converge, and where they quietly disagree, in how performance coaching appears to support or frustrate need satisfaction in customer-facing sales roles. Small differences matter here. Those differences also set up the limitations and implications discussed in Section 6.

5.1. Autonomy-Supportive Coaching and Employee Ownership

Building from the autonomy foundation outlined in Section 3.2, the reviewed literature tends to align on a practical point: coaching is more likely to be internalized when employees experience the interaction as autonomy-supportive rather than controlling (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Slemp et al., 2018). That distinction is easy to say. It is harder in practice. Some studies appear to treat autonomy support as “choice and voice,” while others lean more toward “meaningful rationale and noncontrolling language,” and that measurement difference likely shifts what counts as effective coaching in the results (Reeve et al., 2002; Slemp et al., 2018). A second tension shows up in high-pressure settings: tighter monitoring and fast corrective cycles may be interpreted as controlling even when managers intend to be helpful, which makes it difficult to separate coaching quality from the broader performance climate (Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020). These nuances matter because they imply autonomy support is not one behavior, but a bundle of signals that employees decode under pressure.

5.2. Competence Development Through Training and Feedback Utility

In line with the competence framing in Section 3.3, the literature generally suggests that coaching supports motivation when it helps employees interpret feedback as usable information for skill growth rather than as a verdict on ability (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). Feedback utility seems to be the hinge. Still, the reviewed studies do not treat “competence support” the same way; some emphasize structured skill-building and clear performance expectations, while others emphasize how feedback is delivered and whether it preserves dignity during correction, and those differences may explain mixed effects reported across contexts (Hart, 2025c; Hart, 2025e). One limitation also stays in the background: when competence is inferred from short-term performance metrics, coaching may reward quick fixes and overlook durable learning, so the evidence base can blur “doing better this week” with “getting better over time” (Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This matters because competence support is not just more feedback. It is feedback that employees can use without feeling diminished.

5.3. Interpersonal Relatedness and the Relational Tone of Coaching

Consistent with Section 3.4, the reviewed literature tends to treat relatedness as a condition that makes coaching believable and psychologically safe, not merely “nice” (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). Tone carries weight. Even so, studies appear to vary in what they count as evidence of relatedness support: some lean on perceived supervisor care and trust, while others use indicators like communication quality or the sense that the coach understands the employee’s daily constraints, which can create apples-to-oranges comparisons in synthesis (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Slemp et al., 2021). A recurring

limitation is that relational effects are harder to isolate in environments with high turnover, distributed teams, or rapid manager changes, because “relationship” may not have time to form even when coaching intentions are strong (Slemp et al., 2021). Relatedness is the quiet mechanism. If it is thin, the same coaching script can land as surveillance.

5.4. Integrated SDT Pattern in High-Pressure Sales Contexts

When synthesized, the findings suggest that performance coaching operates as a social context that can either support or frustrate autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relatedness, with downstream implications for motivation quality and commitment (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). The evidence cited in the literature review indicates that autonomy-supportive approaches correspond with stronger persistence and engagement, while sales environments shaped by monitoring and constant evaluation increase the risk of need frustration when coaching becomes primarily controlling (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Reeve et al., 2002). This integrated pattern reinforces the study’s central position that Gen Z does not have different needs but may be more attuned to whether coaching practices support those needs in real time (Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020). These findings set up the discussion section by pointing toward actionable coaching recommendations that preserve accountability while strengthening ownership, skill growth, and relational trust in customer-facing sales roles (Deci et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2019).

6. Discussion

6.1. Significance of the Findings

The findings suggest that performance coaching in customer-facing sales roles is not simply a management routine, but a social context that shapes motivation through autonomy, competence, and interpersonal

relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This matters because the same metrics and accountability structures can produce different outcomes depending on whether coaching is experienced as developmental support or as control and correction (Deci et al., 2017; Hart, 2025d; McAnally & Hagger, 2024). The evidence summarized aligns with this interpretation, particularly where autonomy-supportive leadership and autonomy-supportive feedback are linked to stronger persistence and engagement (Reeve et al., 2002; Slemp et al., 2018). In that sense, the contribution is less about removing standards and more about explaining why standards delivered without psychological need support are likely to weaken motivation and commitment in high-pressure contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019).

6.2. Interpreting Gen Z without Assuming Different Needs

The SDT framing supports a restrained stance on generational explanations by treating autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic psychological needs rather than cohort-specific preferences (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020). What appears to vary is the salience of need satisfaction and the expectations that Gen Z brings to workplace communication, especially regarding frequent feedback, clarity, and leader presence (Aksakal & Ulucan, 2024; Chillakuri, 2020). In customer-facing sales roles, that salience may intensify how coaching interactions are interpreted, as coaching is one of the most recurring moments when employees can experience voice, development, and respect (Hart, 2025b; Hart, 2025d; Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020). A reasonable alternative interpretation is that some patterns attributed to Gen Z may reflect early-career realities in demanding roles, yet the SDT mechanism remains the same, namely, whether coaching supports or frustrates universal needs (Deci et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2019).

6.3. Practical Implications for Coaching in Customer-Facing Sales

The findings imply that leaders can make meaningful improvements without redesigning the entire performance system, because coaching behaviors can be adjusted in real time within existing structures (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomy support is strengthened when leaders preserve employee ownership within constraints by inviting input, acknowledging challenges, and framing expectations in ways that emphasize volition rather than pressure (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Slemp et al., 2018). Competence support becomes more credible when feedback is converted into specific skill-building guidance, practice opportunities, and development-oriented check-ins, which aligns with the emphasis on ongoing coaching and growth expectations (Chillakuri, 2020; Hart, 2025d; Jayathilake et al., 2021). Relatedness support is strengthened when leaders show consistent engagement and deliver honest but supportive feedback while operating as participating teammates, which, according to the literature reviewed (Erawati, 2024; Hart, 2025a; Laiman et al., 2023), is associated with higher satisfaction and retention-relevant outcomes. These implications lead directly to the conclusions by consolidating what leaders can do immediately to support autonomy, competence, and relatedness while maintaining accountability in customer-facing sales environments (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

6.4. Limitations and Potential Sources of Bias

These findings should be read with clear boundary conditions. Some bias is likely. Because the included articles were drawn largely from peer-reviewed, English-language management and psychology outlets, the synthesis may lean toward Western settings and Western assumptions

about autonomy, voice, and supervisor-employee relationships, which can shape how “need support” is defined and recognized (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020). In practical terms, coaching behaviors that signal respect or choice in a U.S. inside-sales team, such as publicly recognizing individual initiative or encouraging open disagreement in one-on-ones, may land differently in more collectivist or high power-distance workplaces, even when the manager’s intent is similar (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This matters for transferability. For that reason, the framework is best interpreted as a well-supported map for the contexts represented in the reviewed literature, rather than a universal template that travels unchanged across cultural settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

A second limitation comes from the mix of conceptual and empirical work in the final set. Conceptual articles can clarify mechanisms, but they also tend to privilege clean theoretical distinctions and managerial narratives, while empirical studies sometimes show messier patterns tied to measurement choices, incentive systems, and short-term performance pressure (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). The synthesis, then, may slightly overstate coherence across autonomy, competence, and relatedness when the underlying studies operationalize coaching and outcomes in different ways, such as using self-report engagement in one study and quota attainment in another, which makes direct comparison imperfect (Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Slemp et al., 2018). This is not fatal. Still, it suggests the managerial implications should be treated as directionally useful guidance that requires local testing, rather than as settled prescriptions that will generalize across industries and measurement systems (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

6.5. Future Research

Future research can strengthen practical guidance by observing coaching experiences in real time and in clearly defined customer-facing sales contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hart, 2025b; McAnally & Hagger, 2024). Designs that track repeated coaching interactions can clarify when feedback is experienced as autonomy-supportive versus controlling, and how that distinction predicts motivation and commitment across pressure cycles (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Intervention studies that train leaders in autonomy support, competence-building feedback, and relational consistency would also help translate these patterns into evidence-based coaching routines that sales leaders can deploy with confidence (Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Slemp et al., 2018).

7. Conclusion

This integrative review suggests that performance coaching may shape employee motivation and retention in customer-facing sales roles by influencing autonomy, competence, and relatedness, although those signals are likely to travel differently across cultural and organizational settings. The literature supports the view that autonomy-supportive leadership and feedback are associated with greater persistence and engagement, making coaching style a realistic lever in high-pressure environments (Hart, 2025a; Hart, 2025b; Reeve et al., 2002; Slemp et al., 2018). In this framing, Gen Z is not treated as having distinct psychological needs, but rather as being potentially more attuned to whether those needs are supported in routine leader interactions (Olafsen & Deci, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This shifts the practical conversation away from cohort labels and toward what leaders can change in real time during coaching conversations (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The most actionable implication is that leaders can maintain accountability

while making coaching visibly supportive of need through small, repeatable behaviors (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Zhou et al., 2019). To support autonomy, leaders can offer bounded choices during coaching by asking employees to choose between two acceptable approaches to achieving the same metric, and then briefly stating the rationale for why the metric matters (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020). To support competence, leaders can end each coaching session with one specific skill to practice before the next shift, paired with one concrete performance cue to watch for, which aligns with the chapter's emphasis on training and feedback that improves capability rather than merely judging outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Olafsen & Deci, 2020). To support relatedness, leaders can open coaching with a short check-in that signals respect and safety, then deliver honest feedback in a supportive tone that communicates investment and team belonging (Laiman et al., 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2020). These moves are designed to be implementable immediately within metric-driven sales systems where monitoring and evaluation already exist (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Zhou et al., 2019). Used as a guiding map rather than a universal rulebook, the framework can help sales leaders and scholars notice where coaching supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and where local conditions may quietly change how those signals are received (Hart, 2025b).

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, G.H.; methodology, G.H.; formal analysis, G.H., and D.B.; investigation, G.H.; resources, G.H.; data curation, G.H.; writing-original draft preparation, G.H and D.B.; writing-review and editing, G.H and D.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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