

THE IMPACT OF BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS ON SALESPEOPLE'S PERFORMANCE: EXPLORING THE MODERATING ROLE OF CULTURE

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Abstract

Purpose - The aim of this paper is to examine the impact of Big Five Factor of personality traits on salespeople's performance, taking into consideration the mediating role of customer orientation, as well as exploring the moderating role of culture.

Design/Methodology/Approach – The Big Five Factor (BFF) of personality traits was used in this paper base on salespeople's performance literature. This paper proposed a framework with customer orientation as a mediating factor and culture as a moderating factor of salespeople's performance.

Findings – Research on salespeople's performance is an ongoing process, which has attracted much attention from various stakeholders to find out befitting combination of factors for effective salespeople's performance. This paper found out that no specific sets of factors could lead to effective salespeople's performance in all situations because performance is a context-based outcome. The big five factor alone cannot effectively explain salespeople's performance. Salespeople's customer orientation can play a significant mediating role in the big five-factor framework in predicting salespeople's performance. Additionally, the moderating effect of salespeople's culture in the proposed model is revealed to help enormously in determining differences, if any, in the salespeople's performance.

Originality/value - The in-depth review of different factors influencing salespeople's performance helps practitioners (such as sales managers, executives, supervisors, as well as human resource managers) by signifying which combinations of factors can best predict better salespeople's performance in particular instances, hence assist proper decision as regards to potential sales team. In addition, the proposed framework in this paper helps researchers by providing a tool for systematic evaluation and testing of real empirical situation of salespeople's performance.

Keywords – Big Five Factor, Salespeople's performance, Customer Orientation (CO), Personality traits

Paper type – Conceptual paper

INTRODUCTION

Sales personnel are among the most essential asset of an organization, especially being the revenue generators that keep the light of every committed organization illuminating. Without them, the overall corporate objectives will be bedeviled; hence assessing their performance is paramount to every proactive organization. Assessing sales force performance has been a

central consideration factor that guide managerial decision, especially with regards to information needed in events of terminating sales forces appointment, promotion, or compensation, and several other managerial decision to enhance sales organization's efficiency and effectiveness (Piercy, Cravens, & Morgan, 1998). In addition, sales force performance is used in managing sales employment dispute (Lublin, 1994). One of the oldest studies conducted in this field by Churchill et. al. (1985) lamented that previous studies on sales force performance have not yield effective outcome. Hence, researchers still remain adamant with regards to the selection of unseemly performance indicators, use of improper dimensions, or merely employing wrong measures (Piercy *et al.*, 1998) depending on their organizational objectives and goals, industry type, and sales force characteristics.

However, researchers have suggested that the potential methodology to the study of sales force performance could be construed from assessing the salespeople's actions, instead of the outcomes ascribed to them (Piercy *et al.*, 1998). Challagalla and Shervani (1996) highlighted behaviors such as planning sales calls, sales presentations, and involvement in team-based selling efforts. In retrospect, different researchers have used different perspective towards understanding salespeople's performance. Factors such as role perceptions, skills and organizational variables, efforts, and sales person's learning (Boles *et al.*, 2000; Brashear *et al.*, 1997; Cross *et al.*, 2007); organizational as well as individual market orientation (Smith & Tennessee, 2000); customer orientation (Cross *et al.*, 2007); sales skills (Basir *et al.*, 2010). In addition, other studies have looked into the impact of personality characteristics on salespeople's performance. For example, Rothmann and Coetzer, (2003) observed the direct relationship between the personality characteristics and job performance in general. Specifically, other studies evaluated the impact of personality on sales person's performance (Furnham & Fudge, 2008; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Smith & Tennessee, 2000; Verbeke, 1994) in which most of them use the big five factor model as a theoretical underpinning.

Problem statement

Effective salespeople's performance is one of the important decision tools used in organizations, especially when it comes to sales force planning. Salespeople's performance could be explained qualitatively or quantitatively in terms of sales closed in designated period. Notwithstanding, researchers have provided several dimensions with which salespeople's performance could be assessed. One of the salient studies in this domain is the work of Colletti and Tubridy (1993) in which they highlighted some activities that may describe successful salespeople. They mentioned that such activities include selling, effective cooperation and collaboration with distributors and colleagues, aptitude for entraining the customers, punctuality in meetings, product's servicing, account servicing, effective and efficient routing, effective communication and information provision, as well as recruitment and training. All these activities were observed to affect the performance of salespeople irrespective of the industry in which they operate. However, this does not argued that the performance indicators are the same in all situations rather they are different (Chonko, Roberts and Dubinsky, 2002) based on the situation and other peculiar characteristics surrounding the type of selling, product, and the salespeople involved. In another study, Campbell (1990) came up with about ten criteria, which are more encompassing than Chonko, *et. al.* (2002). Such criteria include company knowledge, customer knowledge, product knowledge and competitor knowledge, extent of customer relations, expense account management, time management and planning, ability to meet up with quota, and ultimately sales volume. In another perspective however, this criteria or checklist could be abridged into four (annual sales volume, gross profit per sale, annual sales volume and profit growth customer relations) which are invariably the basic objectives of most of the salespeople

performance evaluation (Salleh & Razak, 2011). Psychologists have argued that behavior especially in job performance can be explained from examining the inherent characteristics deeply rooted in the individual person doing the job (Consiglio, Alessandri, Borgogni, & Piccolo, 2013; Hertz & Donovan, 2000). It is on this premise that we examine the personality characteristics of the salespeople as it affects salespeople's performance.

Previous studies conducted have examined the relationships of various dimensions of salespeople's performance using different models. However, no single dimension had proven to be the ultimate criteria of assessing salespeople's performance (Piercy *et al.*, 1998). As a result, this paper attempted the use of Five Factor Model of personality to evaluate the extent of salespeople's performance.

Research Objective

The basic objectives of this paper are three fold as follows:

1. To explore the relationship between the big five factors, salespeople's customer orientation and salespeople performance
2. To explore the moderating effect of culture, if any, on the overall proposed model of sales force performance.
3. To propose a comprehensive model of salespeople performance with regard to Big Five personality traits along with the mediating and moderating role of customer orientation and culture, respectively.

Research questions

Having these objectives, this paper will attempt to answer three questions derived from the objective.

1. What is the relationship between big five factor of personality, customer orientation and salespeople's performance?
2. Does culture moderate the relationship between personality traits, customer orientation and salespeople's performance?

Literature Review

Big Five Factor and sales force performance

Contemporary researchers in psychology have unanimously converged on the opinion that there are five underlying personality traits or characteristics possess by individuals. The testimony as regards to this theory has been developing for more than five decades. This assertion begins with the work of D. W. Fiske (1949) which was subsequently extended upon by several other researchers (Norman, 1967; Smith, 1967; Goldberg, 1981; McCrae & Costa 1987), all of which premised that the big five personality traits could be used to predict employee job performance. However, researchers do not always agree on the exact characteristics for each dimension, even though there is a substantial body of literature buttressing this model of personality. Notwithstanding, the five dimension categories are usually illustrated as Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness.

Many empirical findings in psychology, have so far established that human personality invariably reflect his/her behavior generally and specifically in job related behavior. Performance as an outcome of behavior is proven to be predicted by individual personality

characteristics. In their meta-analysis of personality and job performance, Hurtz et al (2000) revisited the big five factor and find substantive argument for the relationship between the big five personality traits dimension and job performance, while another research has specifically confirmed the predictive validity of the big five personality traits toward predicting overall salespeople's performance (Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese, & Thoresen, 2004a).

Customer Orientation and Salespeople's Performance

Several studies were conducted and reports confirmed the link between customer orientation and salespeople's performance (Arndt & Karande, 2012). The notion of customer orientation originated from the work of Levitt (1960), and it was described as the extent to which salespeople get acquainted with trying to assist their customers in making purchase decisions that will invariably satisfy their needs and wants (Arndt & Karande, 2012; Wan-Jing April Changa & Tung Chun Huang, 2011). They further explained that when salespeople engage in some behaviors meant to achieve customer satisfaction, he/she could be regarded as a customer oriented salespeople. This can be so if they (salespeople's) pursue customer-oriented sales strategies and clearly express interest in the customer they serve, as well as when they generate their business solutions with customers in mind. The finding of Wan-Jing study confirmed that customer orientation has a positive relationship with job performance. Sales personnel who have high customer orientation will do everything possible to satisfy their customers. In addition, customer orientation has been expressed to have significant positive impact on the level of performance of both company (Narver & Slater, 1990; Singh & Ranchhod, 2004) and individual salespeople (Sujan *et al.*, 1994; Donovan *et al.*, 2004). It should be noted that today different customers have diverse sets of needs and demands, unless salespeople's are extensively customer oriented, they will find it difficult to retain even their existing customers talk more of prospecting new ones. Therefore, top performing sales people are expected to possess high level of product knowledge, company knowledge and industry and of course extensive customer knowledge in as much as the company expects them to meet up with the established standard. More often than not, customer orientation of a salespeople can be enhanced if the company itself has high level of customer orientation as inbuilt as part of the corporate culture. A study conducted to evaluate the relationship between customer orientation and salespeople performance has confirmed customer orientation can completely mediate the relationship between company customer orientation and salespeople's customer orientation (Cross *et al.*, 2007).

Relationship among personality traits, customer orientation, and salespeople's performance

Researchers have tried to examine the extent to which customer orientation can mediate the relationship between personality characteristics and sales force performance; some have proved this premise though the result is not yet widely validated across all industries. According to Guion and Gottier (1965:151), the employer's genuine need to predict the specific behavior they expect to have in a given employee is one of the key reason for using recruit one of the basic reason for using personality testing in employee selection. Several empirical findings have indicated that individual use the five dimensions in the five-factor model to identify individual personality differences, and it was shown that the extent of validity of the dimensions as an influencing factor of customer orientation might vary with situations in which one finds. This clearly indicated that personality characteristics can be used to predict the likely behavior a potential employee will exhibit on the job, specifically

their customer orientated behavior as well as the ultimate performance (Periatt *et al.*, 2007). Scholars have particularly explained that customer-oriented behavior resulting from genuine personality characteristics can result in sound understanding of customers' needs that will ultimately help in assisting customers to meet up with their objectives by furnishing them with relevant information and assistance (Stock & Hoyer, 2005). Thus, this tendency or predisposition to help customers realize their needs is identified as the main factor influencing customer overall satisfaction which may assist organization creates long-term relational relationship, and ultimately build profitable organization (Donavan, *et al.*, 2004). Impliedly, this finding explains the underlying relationship among personality characteristics, salespeople's customer orientation, and salespeople's performance. In addition, apart from the established direct relationship, it buttresses the fact that personality traits might have indirect relationship through customer orientation with salespeople's performance. Meanwhile, customer orientation is a potential mediator between the two respective constructs. It should be noted however, this paper attempt to use the big five factor of personality traits in its original form to propose a model of salespeople's performance through the salespeople's orientation.

Subsequently, the five dimensions in the big five factor model will be individually examined and analyzed in line with the previous studies in the context of salespeople's performance.

Extraversion and salespeople's job performance

According to McCrae *et al.* (2005) based on a report in collaboration with the members of personality profiles of culture project; extraversion was described as a personality trait that includes characteristics such as "excitability, sociability, talkativeness, assertiveness and high amounts of emotional expressiveness".

Extraversion was identified as one of the salient personality trait that is expected to denote high correlation with sales performance (Furnham & Fudge, 2008). Barrick *et al.* (2001) predicted the tendency that extraversion would record a significant positive relationship with salespeople's performance because recurring literature has confirmed this finding. However, prior to this assertion, a study conducted by Crant, J. (1995) did not report any significant positive relationship between extraversion and salespeople's performance. In his analysis of findings, he mentioned that among the possible explanation for this result was there might be possibility that high level of extraversion can hinder performance, because the salespeople will be preoccupied with being excited, engaging in social relation, or expressing any of the aforementioned dimensions of extroversion with the customer rather than effective selling activities Warr (2002).

Furthermore, it was contemplated that there was a curvilinear relationship between productivity and extraversion, so much so that optimal performance will be achieved with moderate level of extroversion hence low correlation between the predictor (extroversion) and the outcome (salespeople's performance). Notwithstanding, Furnham *et al.* (2008) lamented that the few sample used in the study of Crant (1995) and Warr (2002) did not provide sufficient evidence to generalized their findings on the degree of relationship between the two constructs. He further defended his argument by saying salespeople's with high level of extraversion may be perceived by the customers as either "being nice" or "false", hence becoming detrimental to their respective performance. In the same vein, the introvert customer may perceived extrovert salespeople as unattractive, attention seeker, self-centered or overassertive (Furnham & Fudge, 2008) thereby impeding the salespeople's customer orientation and ultimately low performance.

In another study, extraversion was explicated as “the preferred interpersonal interactions, activity level, need for stimulation, and capacity for joy” (Andreas, 2012). He maintained that highly extrovert people are sociable, active, talkative, customer oriented highly optimistic, fun loving, and affectionate to their clients. Conversely, salespeople low in extraversion will exhibit characteristics such as shyness, inwardly oriented, like staying alone instead, prefer working individually, do not favour team and working in a group, they are reserved, thus may not be effective salespeople (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013; Jaramillo *et al.*, 2007; Thoresen *et al.*, 2004a).

Meanwhile, other researchers have argued that extraversion should have more impact on the contextual performance rather than overall job performance. One of these studies was conducted on personality and job performance, revisiting the big five factor, report indicated that Extraversion is significantly related to the interpersonal facilitation element of contextual performance rather than on task performance (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000).

Agreeableness and Salespeople’s Job Performance

Based on the report in collaboration with the members of personality profiles of culture project, McCrae *et al.* (2005) describes agreeableness as a personality dimension, which consisted of attributes like trust, affection, altruism, kindness, and other pro-social attitudes and behaviors. These various dimensions of agreeableness are expected to be some precursors, capable of influencing positive performance behavior. Researchers have asserted that individual with high level of this personality traits can have tendency to exhibit customer oriented behavior, and ultimately be an effective salespeople (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000).

A study was conducted to evaluate the personality and individual job performance growth trajectory discovered that in jobs with transitional stages such as selling sophisticated products or even pharmaceutical product agreeableness can predict the overall job performance differences as well as trends in each stage of the job (Thoresen *et al.*, 2004a). Even though many researchers scarcely associate agreeableness with overall performance, this study by Thoresen *et al.* (2004) had discovered a significant positive relationship performance growth, even though other studies such as that conducted by Witt *et al.*, (2002) argued that sometimes agreeableness make strong impact when it is subsumed with other personality features such as conscientiousness in determining performance. Agreeableness was scarcely postulated to individually determine the overall of performance. In retrospect, this study concluded that Agreeable salespeople can attain success when successive stages of developing potential customer as well as his/her level of customer orientation is taken into cognizance (Thoresen *et al.*, 2004b).

In the assessment of Costa and Mc-Crae (1995) and McCrae *et al.* (2005), an agreeable person was described as associated with high level of trustworthiness whereas non-agreeable person was assumed manipulative, pessimistic and self-serving. As a result, scholars describe employee integrity, as an antecedent of agreeableness. This is because trusting relationship toward salespeople by their customers is essential in order to attain high level of effectiveness (Sackett & DeVore, 2001). To support this argument, one of the early meta-analysis in sales literature conducted Swan *et al.* (1998) has reported a significant positive relationship between salespeople’s performance and customers’ level of trust in the salespeople. Therefore, one may assert that the effectiveness of salespeople-customer collaboration may be the rationale behind the predictive validity of agreeableness toward salespeople’s performance (Thoresen *et al.*, 2004a). In line with this argument, other meta-analyses (Hogan & Holland, 2003; Mount *et al.*, 1998) reviewed that there was a similarity of validity between agreeableness and conscientiousness especially where the job involved

emphasizes interpersonal interaction, specifically where getting along is very paramount in performance achievement. It should be noted therefore, since selling job require some degree of interaction with customers, there is need for the salespeople to gain high level of trust from customer, only then his/her optimal performance will be assured if agreeableness is considered as a predictor of performance. Equally, acquired trust will go along away to fine-tune the extent of the salespeople customer orientation, which is invariably necessary for effective performance especially in personal selling and other direct selling technics. This is not restricted to brick and mortar salespeople, agreeableness can also play an influential role in determining the effectiveness of online sales agent since most of the components of agreeableness especially trust are needed in building and maintaining long term relation with online customers .

Conscientiousness and Salespeople's Job Performance

Apart from the personnel overall intelligence, Behling (1998) claimed that conscientiousness is among the key effective elements in determining most job performance. Supporting this claim, many scholars believed that conscientiousness is the basic, or even the only personality traits used in employee selection (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). Scholars have described conscientiousness with salient characteristics such as high levels of thoughtfulness, couple with goal directed behavior, as well as excellent impulse control. Empirical findings in many Psychological researches confirmed that individual high in conscientiousness is likely to be mindful of details and organized in their activities (McCrae *et al.*, 1987, 2005).

Findings in the most cited meta-analyses of sales performance literature (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Salgado, 1997) has been the basis for the claim mentioned earlier. These studies have mentioned conscientiousness repeatedly as the most valid predictor of performance criteria across occupational groups. For example, the work of Barrick *et al.* (2001) reported larger correlation for conscientiousness over other personality characteristics, which resulted in unanimous conclusion by subsequent researchers that conscientiousness can be a valid determinant of job performance irrespective of industry specification. This is because conscientiousness is among very few personality-based determinants of job performance which has potential universal applicability especially in sales job (Barrick *et al.*, 2001; Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). In addition, conscientious employees are highly dependable, very much reliable, and overall achievement oriented while employees with non-conscientious personality are direct opposite, they tend to be careless, always halfhearted, and above all undependable (Thoresen *et al.*, 2004a)

In their study, Roberts, *et al.*, (2005) gave a clearer description of conscientious individuals in the following quoted statement. They mentioned that people with conscious personality traits

“...are inherently “meticulous, thorough, neat, well-organized, able to hold the impulses in check, dedicated to their goals, persistent, dependable, trustworthy, industrious, and achievement striving”

According to Conner and Abraham (2001), naturally, conscientious people have positive attitude towards their job and tend to be punctual in everything they do (Karthikeya & Srivastava, 2012; Fallon, *et al.*, 2000). Rustin *et al.*, (2009) conducted meta-analysis of the relationship between personality trait of conscientious people and job performance along three benchmarks – overall, task and contextual performances. They discovered that there is a moderating effect of situational factors in various occupations. Therefore, the assessment of

conscientious employee can be excelled by considering some surrounding circumstances rather than looking at individual differences based ability alone in respect to conscientiousness – performance relationship. Their findings indicated that relative effectiveness of conscientiousness would be greater in jobs that are characteristically weaker or less challenging (e.g. selling mere convenience goods) or jobs that have minimal level of ramifications (e.g. telemarketing job, customer care in the call center, etc.). However, effectiveness of conscientiousness would be lesser in jobs characterized with high level of consequences (e.g. dealing in nuclear power, high-end surgery, advanced technologies and related intelligence equipment).

Neuroticism and Salespeople’s Job Performance

Neuroticism, as a personality characteristic, has been studied in various situations that concern individuals ranging from work related activities that affect both performance and job stress (Luz-Eugenia *et al.*, 2004) and it has received greater attention by researchers especially in studies pertaining to coping with job behaviors. Neuroticism was described as an emotional stability or instability. Psychologists have unanimously agreed that the result of arousal differences account for variations in terms of individual neurotic characteristics, which normally determines emotional reaction. These characteristics can be measured from extremely high to extremely low (Marsh *et al.*, 2010; Marsh *et al.*, 2013) such that individual with extremely high neurotic personality trait may likely exhibit poor performance. Whereas person with low neurotic score may exhibit high performance especially in jobs that require excessive emotional stability such as selling in which case salespeople invariably deals with customers with different cultural values, believes, social orientation, divergent needs and extremely high level of variation in their level of temperament.

A study conducted in the Pakistan’s banking sector aims to evaluate the effect of personality on job performance highlighted that neuroticism comprises of some negative attributes among which are stress, nervousness as well as anxiety. Compare to emotionally stable employee, researchers confirmed that an individual with high score on neuroticism is likely to perform badly in a job (Abdullah *et al.*, 2013). Notwithstanding, there are few studies that proved this findings otherwise. They argue that individual who work hard with caution normally cushion the effect of unpleasant and stressful repercussions of emotional stability (Edwards, 1992; Spector *et al.*, 2000). However, Abdullah *et al.*, (2013) reiterated that neuroticism can be a good predictor of job performance. His study on the Pakistani banking employees supported this assertion, proposing neuroticism to negatively relate to the workers’ contextual as well as task performances. However, this relationship was found to be statistically insignificant, even though there was a correlation between the two types of performances (task and contextual) mentioned in the study.

Another study conducted to evaluate the relationship between personality and performance in a stressful situation found a significant negative correlation between neuroticism and performance (Jeremy, 2007; Siadat *et al.*, 2011). Their finding supported the study proposition that high neurotic individual has less accuracy in their performance especially in a situation that need analytical thinking or highly pressured job such as sales job. Moreover, employees with high score in neuroticism has high tendency of dissatisfaction, ineffectiveness, absenteeism, or even turnover from his/her job. In essence, neuroticism construct has been found to be the salient factor in the big five factor having a negative relationship with performance (Luz-Eugenia *et al.*, 2004). While describing the dimensions of big five factor, Srivastava (2006) explained that a neurotic individual is likely to experience negative emotions like anger, anxiety, depression, or even vulnerability. It should be noted

however, none of the antecedents of neuroticism identified earlier are among the expected characteristics or behavior of a potential salespeople. Therefore, in order to become an effective sales person, one is expected to have very low score in neuroticism. Such effect is well ascertained especially where other factors significantly interact together (Barrick *et al.*, 2001). Not only in selling job, a research conducted to evaluate the relationship between personality traits and job performance of the ministry of education staff in Iran shows that neuroticism significantly influence performance of the staff because in the Ministry of Education, staff mostly engaged with people on daily basis. Therefore, staffs are expected to have low score of neuroticism in order to effectively managed and carry out their task effectively. This suggests that highly neurotic employee cannot have good customer orientation since customer oriented salespeople are always ready to entertain problems of customers irrespective of their behavior, whether favorable or unfavorable (Arndt & Karande, 2012).

In one of the salient studies of the relationship between personality and job performance in sales that was carried out in the context of telesales Swedish employees, neuroticism was found to be moderately correlated with job performance (Andreas, 2012). In addition, he described neurotic personnel as individual with tendency to be shy, angry, depressed, insecure, vulnerable, or someone with high level of anxiety. He further explained that most of the previous meta-analysis confirmed that individual with low levels of neuroticism performs better in sales related jobs across cultures and this finding was to be universally applicable.

Moreover, because neurotic employee is characterized with experiencing negative emotions like anger, anxiety, depression, and vulnerability, the tendency of such employee to be customer oriented is relatively low (Arndt & Karande, 2012). They based their assertion on considering the fact that a customer oriented employee is expected to have high level of emotional stability, since he/she is likely to deal with different type of customers with divergent personality characteristics. Therefore, it seems logical to deduce that neurotic salespeople may likely perform worse, not as good as salespeople that are not neurotic. In essence, this paper also proposed that neuroticism will have negative relationship with performance especially in a salespeople's job.

Openness to experience and salespeople's performance

Openness to experience is another dimension in the five factor model of personality trait that is used by many researchers to predict job performance especially in sales related job (Thoresen *et al.*, 2004a). It was described as personality characteristics of an individual who are invariably imaginative, creative, as well as inquisitive towards new ideas (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Furnham & Fudge, 2008). A study conducted with about 66 sales workers in UK, revealed that openness to experience has a significant relationship with salespeople's performance. Notwithstanding, research findings indicated that weak relationship should always be expected between openness to experience and overall job performance, the construct has been identified to have a highly significant impact especially on training performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Furnham & Fudge, 2008). They further explained that high scorers of openness to experience trait usually tend to have positive orientation towards their individual ideas and experiences, while low scorers may not prefer repetitive task. This indicates that low scorers in openness to experience may not be effective sales personnel. According to Costa *et al.*, (1992), openness to experience dimension also relates to salespeople's emotional processes. When compared to low scorers, high scorers on this dimension might likely experience extensive emotional condition, which is both high level of

happiness and unhappiness respectively. Moreover, Costa *et al.*, (1992) identified six different dimensions related to openness to experience which include fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, ideas, and values.

It is pertinent to mention however, findings from prior studies in the field of personality – job performance relationship did not uniformly converge on the degree to which openness to experience determine job performance. A study conducted by Barrick and Mount (2001) reported insignificant relationship between overall job performance and openness to experience, though it can determine the performance and success in a specific job or task. Therefore, since sales call on phone for example is known to be a repetitive as well as fixed task, it is logical to predict salespeople with high score on openness to experience to perform better than low scorer on the same dimension.

Meanwhile, in a study aimed at making a comparison of the relationships of a market orientation, personality characteristics and salespeople's customer orientation, it was found that salespeople's with high score in openness to experience would probably become perceptive, imaginative and inquisitive, and are likely to realize and suggest clear solutions for customers' true needs and problems. This suggests that salespeople with openness to experience are likely to have high customer orientation and ultimately achieve effective performance. Equally, in the study of logistics sales representatives and other front line employees, Perriatt, et al (2007) reported a significant positive relationship between openness to experience and customer orientation. This finding suggested that customer orientation could effectively mediate the relationship between personality traits of openness to experience and salespeople's performance.

Can culture moderate the relationship between personality traits and salespeople's performance?

Culture is a total way of live of people, thus peoples' culture affect their overall attitude and behavior. In the words of Rossi and O'Higgins (1980) culture is either a system of shared cognitions or a system of shared symbols and meanings. Even though, many researches have been conducted about the effect of culture on different facets of human behaviour, however, little researches have been dedicated to evaluate the effect of culture on performance and effectiveness due to the difficulty of operationalizing the construct (Kim *et al.*, 2004). The numerous diversities of people around the world as well as differences and requirements in various jobs may be among other possible reasons. Notwithstanding, other studies have asserted that culture can be treated explicitly as variable for specific research purpose (Chatman & Jehn, 1994; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Kotter & Heskett, 1992). In addition, other empirical evidences that support similar findings are numerous. In their study on modeling the effect of national culture on performance of bank employees (Halkos & Tzeremes, 2011) found sufficient evidence of a cultural pattern which has a significant positive influence on employees performance. They mentioned lower masculine, uncertainty avoidance and power distance values and moderate individualistic values among some of the cultural values that can differentiate performance.

On this note, based on the finding of Chatman and Jehn (1994), Denison and Mishra, 1995, and Kotter and Heskett, (1992), this paper attempts to examine the extent to which culture, either individual or organizational, can moderate the relationships between salespeople's' personality, customer orientation and salespeople's performance.

Proposed Model

Literature on salespeople's performance have revealed that previous studies have used different antecedents towards understanding salespeople's performances. For example, factors such as role perceptions, skills and organizational variables, efforts and sales person's learning (Boles *et al.*, 2000; Brashear, *et al.*, 1997; Cross *et al.*, 2007), organizational as well as individual market orientation (Smith & Tennessee, 2000), customer orientation (Cross *et al.*, 2007), sales skills (Basir *et al.*, 2010), and the host of others. In addition, other studies examined the influence of personality characteristics on salespeople's performance (Furnham & Fudge, 2008; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Salleh & Razak, 2011; Smith & Tennessee, 2000; Verbeke, 1994), majority of the latter studies used the big five factors (BFF) as a theoretical base. In retrospect, this paper attempts to employ the big five factor as theoretical underpinning, while examining its impact on performance mediated by salespeople's customer orientation. The paper equally attempts to examine whether culture can have the potential to moderate the personality – salespeople's relationship. In essence, this paper reflected on these relationships as established from the literature to come up with the proposed model of personality – salespeople's performance (see Figure.1). Furthermore, this paper has come up with five exogenous variables (agreeableness, extroversion, conscientious, neuroticism, and openness to experience) and two endogenous variables (customer orientation and salespeople's performance). Finally, the paper proposed culture in the model as a moderating variable in the model of salespeople's performance, taking into cognizance the salespeople's personality characteristics and customer orientation respectively.

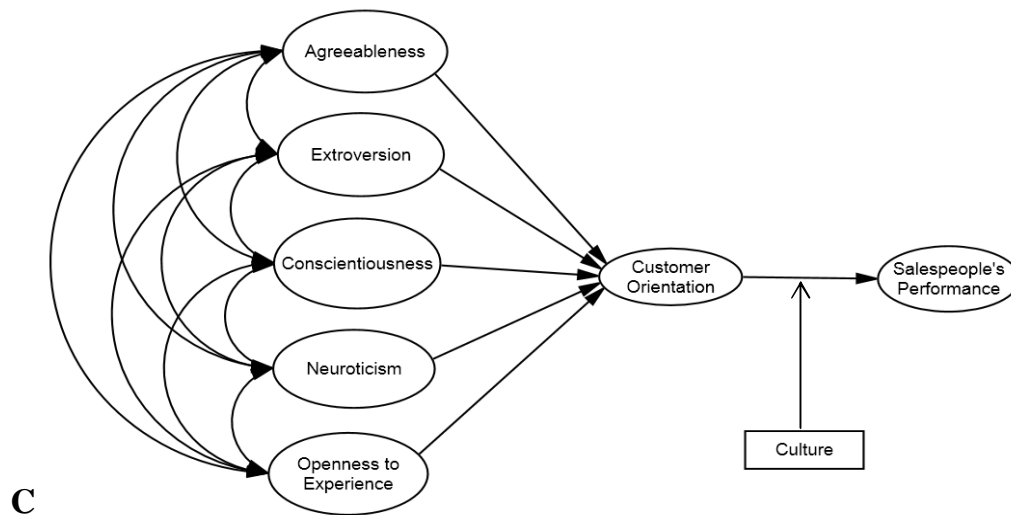


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model of Salespeople's Performance

Salespeople's are the most important resources of any proactive organization because they are the revenue-generating engine for the organization. As a result, it is pertinent for any forward-looking organization to understand the most relevant factors determining salespeople's performance. This has motivated many researches in different industries and societies to discover factors influencing salespeople's performance, each taking different combination of factors based on their respective thoughts and background. In the same vein, researchers have proposed various frameworks in their bid to provide optimal panacea to both the field of study (Sales Management) and the practitioners respectively.

Factors that determine salespeople's performance as identified by previous studies are many and diverse such as role perceptions, skills and organizational variables, efforts and sales person's learning, organizational as well as individual market orientation, customer orientation and sales skills as well as the influence of personality characteristics on salespeople's performance (Basir *et al.*, 2010). Equally, researchers attempted to examine the extent to which salespeople's demographic characteristics can result in differences in the salespeople's performance behavior. In this case, variables such as gender and geographical differences were examined. Following this gigantic work by previous researchers, this paper has employed the big five factor of personality traits and proposed a model of salespeople's performance. The paper also uses customer orientation as another variable that may potentially mediate the relationship between salespeople's personality traits and performance. In retrospect, findings from the literature has indicated that customer orientation can mediate the relationship of the big five factor of personality and salespeople's performance. Finally, the paper attempted to incorporate culture as moderating variable in the proposed model being a very important variable of concern in the selling field.

It should be noted that studies on sales performance is an unending task, especially now that marketing and sales have become a global phenomenon, whereby majority of sales are made out of the parents' company's territory. Hence, there is need for thorough studies that will examine various impacts of culture (of individual employee or organizational culture) and diversity on salespeople's performance. For instance, there is utmost need for future researches to look into the impact of different organizational culture on the model of salespeople's performance proposed in this paper. This will provide organization specific explanation of salespeople's performance, thereby assisting organization in adjusting to context-specific culture, which will better enhance performance. In addition, the relative impact of sales team's norms and values should be closely examined vis-à-vis sales teams' effort and performance. This will help sales managers to appreciate the extent of team or individual selling efforts on sales result and productivity. It is hoped that further studies in the aforementioned directions could help provide better understanding of the salespeople's performance.

However, this paper faced limitations especially concerning the approach used in its build up. Therefore, the paper may not provide a universalized as well as empirical explanation of its propositions. The approach used in this paper is more of qualitative approach that is invariably appropriate in exploratory research studies instead of descriptive or causal studies (Zikmund & Babin, 2010). In addition, considering the strategic importance of salespeople's performance as a decision tool to every sales organization, a study based on few sets of factors may not actually represents the antecedents of salespeople's performance. Hence, a composite study will be more robust in providing concise explanation, such as a study that will incorporate salespeople's characteristics, skills, tenure ship, compensation structure, on one hand, and organizational characteristics, policies, culture, and compensation structure on the other. Even tough, an integrated study, which incorporates some or all of the suggested interactions may be too complex however, it may have more potentials to provide robust explanation of salespeople's performance. Therefore, this paper will call for a more quantitative and empirical methodology capable of encompassing the organizational customer relationship management (CRM) as well as the salespeople's orientation towards information technology. This will afford fitting validation of the proposed model for a better explanation and generalization of findings of salespeople's performance.

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