Empathy and affect in B2B salesperson performance

Article *in* Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing · December 2017

DOI: 10.1108/JBIM-05-2016-0103

CITATIONS
3

READS
123

3 authors:

Nwamaka A. Anaza
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
36 PUBLICATIONS **209** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Eddie Inyang
The College of New Jersey
4 PUBLICATIONS **22** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

José Luis Saavedra
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
43 PUBLICATIONS **119** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Empathy and affect in B2B salesperson performance

Nwamaka A. Anaza
Department of Marketing, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Carbondale, Illinois, USA
Aniefre Eddie Inyang
Department of Marketing and Interdisciplinary Studies, The College of New Jersey, Ewing, New Jersey, USA, and
Jose L. Saavedra
Department of Marketing, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Carbondale, Illinois, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to explore salesperson empathy and the moderating impact of positive/negative affect on a salesperson's listening and adaptive selling behaviors. It also seeks to identify whether and how empathy influences performance.

Design/methodology/approach – The study's hypothesis was analyzed using data collected from business-to-business salespeople working for a manufacturing firm. A partial least squares analysis was used to test the study's proposed hypotheses.

Findings – The results of this study show that empathy and the moderating role of positive affect foster desirable sales behaviors (listening and adaptive selling behaviors) that subsequently enhance in-role (expected) and extra-role (discretionary) performance.

Originality/value – Contributions from the findings enhance the literature through its consideration of how the direct effect of empathy on sales behaviors (a salesperson's listening and adapting selling behavior) is moderated by the salesperson's positive and negative affect and how sales behaviors impact final sales outcomes (in-role and extra-role performance).

Keywords Affect, Empathy, Salespeople, Extra-role performance, In-role performance

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Empathy and positive attitude are among the most widely desirable transformative human emotions and traits recognized by scientists, philosophers, religious leaders and business managers (Judge *et al.*, 1998; Morelli *et al.*, 2015). Organizational interest in empathy and positive affect at work is apparent from the large number of publications demonstrating their favorable effects on employee dispositions and behaviors (Cropanzano *et al.*, 1993; George, 1991; McNeely and Meglino, 1994). Empathy has been found to exert positive and strong effects on pro-social and cooperative behaviors (Eisenberg and Miller, 1987). In the sales literature, research on empathy has shown that a salesperson's ability to share and understand others' emotions increases satisfaction and creates a pathway to future buyer interactions (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2005). Pertinent findings also indicate that salesperson empathy increases sales effectiveness as a reflection on overall organizational performance (McBane, 1995; Pilling and Eroglu, 1994; Spaulding and Plank, 2007).

Despite what we know about empathy, research on this topic in the business-to-business (B2B) sales literature remains heavily underexplored. In a review of emerging research, Bagozzi (2006, p. 455) emphasized that a "positive social emotion in need of more research is empathy". In particular, research remains unclear about how empathy relates to expected and discretionary sales behaviors and performance.

As with other social emotions, empathy cannot occur independently of an individual's affective state (Fredrickson, 2001). Empathy is embedded within an individual's emotional experience where people report experiencing variations in both positive and negative affect. As a result, researchers must jointly account for the role of affective state and empathic emotion when studying B2B salespeople. At present, we are not aware of any existing research studies in the B2B sales literature that examine the combined influence of empathy and affect on beneficial sales behaviors, such as listening and adaptive selling behaviors, nor are we aware of any past studies that investigate whether positive or negative affect act as conditions upon which salesperson empathy is strengthened or weakened. This is certainly an oversight in existing research studies that we intend to correct with our current investigation of salesperson empathy.

To address these gaps, we investigate the direct impact of empathy, as well as the moderating influence of affective states on salesperson listening and adaptive selling behaviors, as a means of explaining in-role and extra-role performance. Drawing on the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), we develop a model that accounts for the direct and moderating influence of emotional factors on sales outcomes.

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at: **www.emeraldinsight.com/0885-8624.htm**

Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing
33/1 (2018) 29–41

[DOI 10.1108/JBIM-05-2016-0103]

Received 23 May 2016
Revised 24 November 2016
Accepted 3 January 2017

Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing
Volume 33 · Number 1 · 2018 · 29–41

The novelty of this study lies in the use of empathy as a social emotion capable of inducing higher sales results. Accordingly, we make the following contributions: First, the study demonstrates that under certain affective conditions, empathy will lead to higher levels of sales behaviors (e.g. listening and adaptive selling behaviors). Second, the study shows that negative affect does not negate the relationship between empathy and sales behaviors. Third, the study establishes the emotional process through which performance is achieved in a B2B sales context.

Theory and hypotheses development

From much of the existing organizational research on empathy and affect, we know that both constructs serve as strong indicators for response tendencies at work (Cropanzano *et al.*, 1993; George, 1991; McNeely and Meglino, 1994). This view is consistent with the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, which suggests that positive emotions *broaden* people's thought-action repertoire and help to *build* enduring resources (Fredrickson, 2001). The resource build-up from positive emotions can manifest in various forms, including cognitive (e.g. expert knowledge), intellectual (e.g. problem-solving skills), social (e.g. social support networks), psychological (e.g. resilience) and physical (e.g. health) resources. These resources can be instrumental for coping and recovery (Tugade *et al.*, 2004) and to foster individual transformations (Fosha, 2005), because they lead to increased psychological resilience and enhanced emotional well-being.

At the core of the broaden-and-build theory is the focus on positive emotions. The present study applies Fredrickson's broaden-and-build model to a positive emotion often ignored in B2B research: *empathy*. Empathy is defined as an emotion where the observer appraises and feels the target's experiences in the same way that the target appraises his/her situation and experiences (Wondra and Ellsworth, 2015). Empathy as an emotion was originally and theoretically grounded in the appraisal theory (Scherer, 1997), which argues that emotions are based on evaluative interpretations of a situation as well as the appraisal of others' emotions (Scherer, 1984; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985). In the sales literature, empathy reflects a "salesperson's demonstration of interest and concern for the welfare of the customer" (Ahearne *et al.*, 2007, p. 606). This definition implies that empathy is an emotional *social* reaction to another person's circumstance, again reinforcing the argument that appraising another individual's experiences can change one's thought-action repertoire. Empathy is believed to stimulate pro-social interactions when salespeople appraise their buyers' emotions in the same way that buyers appraise their own emotions. This appraisal is based on the quantity and quality of the information that the salesperson has about the buyer's situation. To obtain this information, salespeople rely on their ability to communicate and listen to buyers' verbal/non-verbal requests. For this reason, empathy is viewed as an antecedent of salesperson listening behavior and adaptive selling behavior.

Fredrickson in much of her writings on the broaden-and-build model discusses the benefits associated with experiencing positive emotions, of which empathy may similarly offer such benefits. According to findings from various applications of the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions are associated with multiple favorable cognitive and behavioral outcomes that are desirable in salespeople (Sekerka and Fredrickson, 2008; Verbeke *et al.*, 2004), such as greater perseverance, pro-social behaviors and positive reactions to others. The theory also suggests that a positive and broadened mind-set may help individuals grow and improve performance over time (Vacharkulksemsuk *et al.*, 2011). Empathy, as a positive emotion, has similarly been found to result in greater sales effectiveness (Spaulding and Plank, 2007) and trust in salespeople (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2005). Drawing on this theory, we expand on the idea that positive emotions such as empathy can lead to sales performance.

Follow-up studies by Fredrickson and her colleagues further reveal that positive affect similarly broadens human attention and cognition, consequently initiating in people improved thought-processes and actions (Fredrickson and Branigan, 2005; Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002; Fredrickson and Losada, 2005). In fact, Fredrickson and Losada (2005) contend that positive emotions, positive affect, and positive sentiments all broaden the range of people's thoughts and action, which eventually help them to build long-lasting personal resources useful in maintaining social connections and other benefits. For example, Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) in a study involving 138 participants hypothesized that positive affect (and not negative affect) would influence improvements in broad-minded coping over time. Positive and negative affect were operationalized using the positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS) and captured over multiple time periods. Results from their analyses indicated that positive affect indeed broadens people's mind-sets, attention and cognition, thereby resulting in an improved coping mechanism addressing adversity. Furthermore, consistent with their arguments, negative affect did not predict broad-minded coping behaviors when handling adversity. Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) further suggested, using works conducted by Alice Isen, that positive affect broadens cognition and heightens one's scope of attentiveness. Isen (2000, 2008) documents that the role of positive affect is often facilitative in *broadening* individuals focus and perspectives. This thereby allows them to think more logically with greater flexibility through problems by integrating processed information to arrive at better solutions. The facilitative role of positive affect gives credence to its influence as a moderator of positive emotions in strengthening their broadening capabilities.

The broaden-and-build theory also explains that negative affect has the powerful capability of momentarily constricting people's thought-action repertoire, thus weakening their access to a broad range of beneficial cognitive responses and thereby restricting them to poorer outcomes (e.g. attack when angry; flee when afraid) (Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004). However, the resilient use of positive emotions can help people regulate negative emotions, as in the case of empathy (Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004). This process is underscored in what Fredrickson and her colleagues call the undoing hypothesis (Fredrickson *et al.*, 2000). The basis of this hypothesis indicates that when negative emotions inhibit momentary thought-action repertoire, "positive emotions ought to function as efficient antidotes for the lingering effects of negative emotions" (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 221). However, we wonder if negative

affect can similarly undo the effects of a positive social emotion like empathy. We test these relationships in our depicted model in Figure 1.

Empathy, listening and adaptive selling behavior

First, we argue that empathy positively influences salesperson listening behavior. Listening is a complex process requiring mental, affective and actionable activities. Active listening results from a high degree of symmetry between the sender's message and the listener's understanding of that message (Castleberry *et al.*, 2004). Researchers suggest that there are essentially three dimensions of listening: sensing, processing and responding (Ramsey and Sohi, 1997). While these dimensions of listening are independent components that possibly occur simultaneously, they also manifest sequentially, whereby "a message must be sensed before it is processed, and must be processed before it can be responded to" (Comer and Drollinger, 1999, p. 16). Each dimension calls for unique competencies that collectively help in creating a higher-order listening construct (Ramsey and Sohi, 1997). The first component (sensing) entails receiving non-verbal and verbal stimuli from the buyer and filtering out any external intrusions that impact the accurate reception of the message. The second component (processing) involves the mental evaluation of a message by the receiver, thus allowing incoming messages to have meaning. Finally, the third component (responding) gives the receiver an opportunity to react to the message received. It implies answering at appropriate times as well as offering relevant responses to the questions asked.

The present framework argues that empathy increases salesperson active listening behavior. Empathy treated as an emotional disposition is expressed through different behaviors, of which active listening skills emerges as a formative consequence of accurately appraising another individual's experiences (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2005). Empathy increases one's desire to talk less and listen more because only through listening can an individual truly understand and appraise another person's situation. This confirms the principles of appraisal theory, which states that empathy occurs when a salesperson (observer) appraises the target's situation in the same way that the target appraises his/her situation through effective communication behavior (Wondra and Ellsworth, 2015). In a recent qualitative study, Pryor *et al.* (2013) found that buyers interpreted empathy through the lens of listening activities such that salespeople who listened more to their buyers were believed to be more cognitively and emotionally empathic to the buyers' needs. This is in line with Comer and Drollinger's assertion that "as salespeople's empathy increases, their level of listening also rises" since "all salespeople bring a degree of empathy to the listening task" (p. 20). On the basis of this viewpoint, empathic salespeople are believed to be skillful at sensing and processing information, which allows them to probe accurately and deeply, while remaining alert to their buyers' verbal and non-verbal cues (Comer and Drollinger, 1999). Based on these arguments, we formally hypothesize the following:

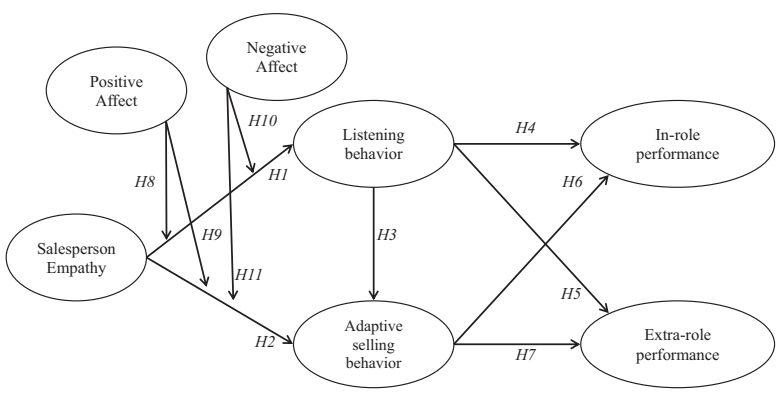
H1. Salesperson empathy relates positively to salesperson listening behavior.

Another characteristic of empathic individuals in service roles is that they have more social influence, as well as the skills to determine when and how to use and manage their emotions and those of others appropriately (Bagozzi *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, empathy is proposed as an antecedent of adaptive selling. Highly adaptive salespeople can easily adapt their behaviors to match various buyer interactions and demands (Weitz *et al.*, 1986). Empathy, in which the salesperson adopts the buyer's psychological outlook, allows the salesperson to forestall the buyer's actions or reactions, thereby fostering stronger interpersonal relationships (Håkansson and Montgomery, 2003). Adapting one's sales technique to accommodate and benefit buyers facilitates reciprocal actions (Wieseke *et al.*, 2012) and nurtures the buyer–seller relationship further (Homburg *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, we anticipate that empathetic salespeople will be better able to predict buyers' reactions, thereby impacting their ability to adapt and address various buying needs with greater sensitivity. For this reason, we formally hypothesize the following:

H2. Salesperson empathy relates positively to salesperson adaptive selling behavior.

Román (2014) suggests that active listening increases the chances of salespeople to recognize and act upon the ever-changing needs of buyers. Salespeople can use information that they gather from listening to their buyers to tailor-make the substance and subject-matter of their messages for better

Figure 1 Conceptual model of salesperson empathy



results throughout the sales process (Boorom *et al.*, 1998). Researchers find that interaction involvement increases adaptiveness in selling, particularly during sales presentations (Boorom *et al.*, 1998). Interaction involvement comprises three dimensions: attentiveness, perceptiveness and responsiveness, which correspond to the three components of listening behavior: sensing, processing and responding. Attentiveness speaks to salespeople's ability to use their listening skills to receive information and sense non-verbal cues from buyers. This equates to the sensing dimension of listening behavior. Perceptiveness addresses the processing aspect of listening, which allows salespeople to comprehend and interpret the communicated message. Responsiveness is congruent to the third dimension of active listening (responding), which captures a salesperson's ability to create appropriate responses necessary to address and respond to the buyer's initial communicated message. While Boorom *et al.* (1998) test and find support for the effect of interaction involvement on adaptive selling, we equally expect to find that listening behavior will reveal similar positive effects on selling adaptiveness. Based on these arguments, we formally hypothesize the following:

H3. Salesperson listening behavior relates positively to salesperson adaptive selling behavior.

Listening, adaptive selling behavior and performance

There are many beneficial consequences that results from active listening, but of primary importance in buyer–salesperson interaction are outcomes that foster long-term business relationships. Researchers have found that industrial salespeople ranked listening as the foremost significant talent required for success in their profession (Pryor *et al.*, 2013), and managers classified listening as one of the most important characteristics sought after in new sales recruits (Marshall *et al.*, 2003). This hints at the possible impact of listening on both in-role and extra-role performance. Research has shown that managers evaluate both types when determining a salesperson's overall performance (MacKenzie *et al.*, 1998), and this influences the manager's compensation, promotion and training decisions (Orr *et al.*, 1989). Moreover, both types of performance have been found to have important effects on the overall financial performance of the organization itself (Burney *et al.*, 2009).

In-role performance is defined as:

> [. . .] the quality of performance with regard to the employee's knowledge of the company, competitor products, and customers; the quality of performance with regard to the accurate management of records, time, and expenses; and the quantity of work achieved (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2005, p. 132).

For salespeople, in-role performance includes primary tasks, such as customer service, prospecting, problem-solving, sales presentations and account management (Young and Albaum, 2003). Meanwhile, extra-role performance is defined as "discretionary behaviors on the part of salespeople that indirectly influence the effective functioning of an organization, without necessarily influencing a salesperson's in-role performance" (Verbeke *et al.*, 2004, p. 388). In this study, we distinguish between in-role and extra-role performance because research on the impact of salesperson empathy on discretionary performance is absent in the B2B literature.

Another concern within empathy research is the current conceptualization of performance as a unidimensional construct focused on company effectiveness (Spaulding and Plank, 2007) or buyer knowledge/relations (McBane, 1995) rather than a multidimensional construct that includes account creation, development and management. As a result, we argue that listening behavior will affect performance through two routes: in-role and extra-role. In other words, sales performance will be strengthened when salespeople listen to their buyers and respond accordingly by adjusting their sales strategies to fit buyers' needs and preferences (Jaramillo *et al.*, 2007). Based on these arguments, we formally hypothesize the following:

H4. Salesperson listening behavior relates positively to salesperson in-role performance.

H5. Salesperson listening behavior relates positively to salesperson extra-role performance.

Similarly, the benefits of adaptive selling behavior are likely to exceed the price of collecting and responding to information, even under difficult circumstances, such as complex and large purchase orders that are likely to result in mistakes. However, even the most modest adjustments to sales interactions, such as preempting questions, appropriate changes to body language, giving buyers greater frequency to ask questions and so on, may enhance buyer–salesperson communication and reduce objections. Accordingly, previous research studies confirm that adaptive selling behavior improves salesperson performance (Jaramillo *et al.*, 2007; Roman and Iacobucci, 2010), regardless of the circumstances and measurement reference (self-reported rating, manager ratings or more objective measures) in which primary emphasis is placed on in-role performance (Franke and Park, 2006).

Researchers also suggest that the practice of adaptive selling may be cognitively motivating, thus fostering a sense of enjoyable challenge in one's sales career (Weitz *et al.*, 1986). The mindful engagement of adaptive selling may offer salespeople an increased satisfaction with their performance (Keillor *et al.*, 1999), and a willingness to do more than is expected on the job. However, researchers can only infer that adaptive selling will produce positive effects on uncompensated voluntary behaviors, as the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and extra-role performance is yet to be empirically tested when empathy is the underlying motivation. This is a gap that researchers acknowledge as existing in the marketing literature. Franke and Park (2006, p. 701) stated that:

> [. . .] measuring variables we did not include in the adaptive selling behavior meta-analysis, such as empathy, [. . .], and in-role versus extra-role performance, could reveal how the relationships between certain variables are mediated or moderated by other variables.

Based on these arguments, we formally hypothesize the following:

H6. Salesperson adaptive selling behavior relates positively to salesperson in-role performance.

H7. Salesperson adaptive selling behavior relates positively to salesperson extra-role performance.

Moderating effects of positive and negative affect

According to the broaden-and-build theory, resources generated by positive emotions and affect may be applied in various organizational contexts, including sales. Researchers have shown that salespeople who exhibit more positive affect and emotions while working are generally more helpful (George, 1998), customer-oriented (Singh and Venugopal, 2015) and willing to engage in pro-social behaviors (George, 1991). Moreover, the distinction between emotions and affect support our contention that both occur in isolation of one another and are not substitutable phrases for each other (Russell, 2009). Affect is "a neurophysiological state, accessible to consciousness as a simple non-reflective feeling" (Russell, 2009, p. 1264). It is the body's way of anticipating an action in a given situation using two general dimensions of positivity or negativity. Affect is experienced consistently, although the type and magnitude of affect changes over time. Unlike affect, emotional episodes are triggered by something, are responses to something and are often about the psychological appraisals involved in the happenings between persons or between person and object (Ekkekakis, 2012). Just like any emotional occurrence, empathy is elicited after an appraisal of another individual's feelings, situation and/or experiences such that a reaction is triggered. In this study, we contend that positive and negative affect moderate the relationship between empathy and salesperson behaviors. This is plausible because empathy is short-lived, while affect changes over time without necessarily starting or ending. As such, we expect that when an empathic gesture is directed at a buyer[1], this can only be strengthen or weakened by the salesperson's changing affective states.

Positive affect broadens one's thoughts and actions (salesperson behavior) in a given situation and helps build resources for long-term benefits (Verbeke and Bagozzi, 2003). Extrapolating from the social psychology literature (Watson *et al.*, 1988), we contend that positive affect, as a state and an enduring human trait, can allow salespeople to draw on high concentration and engagement that foster social communication and listening behaviors. George (1991) confirmed that positive affect as a dispositional state influences role-prescribed work-related and customer-service behaviors, such as paying attention to and answering customers' questions, in the hopes that these behaviors will promote quality customer shopping experiences and higher sales performance. As a result, empathic salespeople who rate high on positive affect should generally perform at higher levels than those who rate lower. Even in instances of adverse sales situations, positive affect should moderate the relationship between empathy and sales behavior such that salespeople will remain positive about their work-related encounters with buyers, without fear of failure and/or conflict.

On the other hand, negative affect is related to aversive emotional states across time, notwithstanding the situation (Watson and Clark, 1984; Watson *et al.*, 1988). In threatening social situations, salespeople with negative affect increase their attention toward the threatening aspect of the situation, narrowing their focus on the specific situation alone, thus making it difficult to adapt their behavior. This consequently causes miscommunication or poorer communication with buyers (Erevelles and Fukawa, 2013). Even when the situation is not threatening, high negative affect individuals are more inclined to experience a significant amount of distress (Watson and Clark, 1984). The distress that follows from negative affect lowers the resource-based influences that empathy is intended to increase such as adaptive selling behaviors. Furthermore, the appraisal theory demonstrates that the salesperson's psychological state influences the salesperson's empathy towards the buyer's situation (Wondra and Ellsworth, 2015) such that negative affect can undo the influences of positive emotions (empathy) on actual selling behavior. Based on this view, when salespeople possess negative emotions, this will be reflected in their behavior toward buyers, by lowering the influence of empathic concern on listening and adaptive selling behaviors.

For many years, research on dispositional affectivity has shown that positive and negative affect are independent states of one another that do not necessarily represent polar opposites of each other (Bradburn, 1969; Watson and Clark, 1997). This demonstrates that positive and negative affect can be present at the same time and can influence individuals concurrently. According to Rojell *et al.* (2006), salespeople can be low on negative affect and high on positive affect, low on both dimensions or high on both dimensions. Based on this view, we approach both dimensions as independent affect-based states and formalize the following hypotheses:

H8. The relationship between salesperson empathy and salesperson listening behavior will be stronger for salespersons high in positive affect than those low in positive affect.

H9. The relationship between salesperson empathy and salesperson adaptive selling behavior will be stronger for salespersons high in positive affect than those low in positive affect.

H10. The relationship between salesperson empathy and salesperson listening behavior will be weaker for salespersons high in negative affect than those low in negative affect.

H11. The relationship between salesperson empathy and salesperson adaptive selling behavior will be weaker for salespersons high in negative affect than those low in negative affect.

Methodology

Sample and data collection

Consistent with our underlying purpose, we chose to study salespeople working for a firm in the industrial goods sector. The focal firm is a Fortune 500 company located in the Mid-western region of the USA. The company manufactures products and provides services to buyers in the commercial, industrial and consumer goods markets. In addition, the firm's salespeople sell to companies in the chemical, construction, energy, manufacturing and telecommunications industries. Its sales force structure is typical of many sales organizations where

salespeople are encouraged to develop relationships with buyers using multiple communication strategies. As a result, we focused on salespeople who spent a significant amount of their time interacting face-to-face with existing and potential buyers.

Data collection proceeded with consent from management. In all, 265 salespeople from one of the firm's sales regions were contacted via electronic mail and were asked to voluntarily participate in the study. The e-mail sent to the salespeople contained a letter of support from the Regional Sales Director encouraging salespeople to participate in the study and informing them that the purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of salesperson behaviors. The e-mail sent to salespeople contained an embedded link that housed the online questionnaire.

Of the 265 salespeople sent an e-mail, 202 of them completed the survey for a response rate of 76.2 per cent. However, two individuals who did not complete all the survey items were dropped at the data analysis stage, leaving a final sample of 200 salespeople. The demographic characteristics of the salespeople were: 175 males (87 per cent), 22 females (11 per cent) and 4 did not indicate any gender orientation (2 per cent). Their ages ranged from 26 to 63 years, with a mean age of 46.4 years (SD = 8.6). The tenure of the salespeople at the firm ranged from 1 year to 29 years, with an average tenure of 19.8 years (SD = 9.3).

Measurement

For this study, we used existing measures that are well established in the literature. Salesperson empathy was measured using three items adapted from Stock and Hoyer (2005). Adaptive selling was measured using five items from Robinson *et al.* (2002). In all, 12 items from Ramsey and Sohi (1997) were used to measure salesperson listening. Ramsey and Sohi's (1997) salesperson listening scale was conceptualized as consisting of three dimensions: sensing, evaluating (processing) and responding. Salesperson extra-role performance was measured using three items adapted from Netemeyer *et al.* (2005), and salesperson in-role performance was measured using six items adapted from Evans *et al.* (2007). Salesperson affectivity was captured both positively and negatively. Inducing responses for affect involved assessing participants' general affective state during a sales call with their buyers. The five positive items were *gleeful*, *elated*, *delighted*, *enthused* and *happy*, while the five negative items were *angry*, *discontented*, *nervous*, *stressed* and *anxious*. All affective items were adapted from Richins (1997). Age, gender and sales experience were used as control variables. Age and sales experience were measured as continuous variables, while gender (0 = female; 1 = male) was measured as a categorical variable. Finally, to determine whether common method variance may be a factor in the study, socially desirable responding was measured using four items from Donavan *et al.* (2004). All constructs were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Measurement model

Tables I and II provide descriptions of each scale and summarize the key psychometric properties for this study. Indicator analysis was conducted to assess validity and reliability. Specifically, the outer loadings of the indicators for each construct were assessed to determine whether they exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold to support convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Indicators between 0.40 and 0.70 should be dropped to improve construct convergence, reliability and variance extracted (Hair *et al.*, 2014). To strengthen convergence and reliability, one indicator was dropped from the Evans *et al.* (2007) "salesperson performance scale" and two indicators were dropped from the Ramsey and Sohi (1997) "salesperson listening scale". The final indicators used in this study along with their loadings are provided in Table II.

The reliability and validity of the measures used in this study were further examined using average variance extracted scores, composite reliability measures and Cronbach's alpha values. As shown in Tables I and II, Cronbach's alpha for all measures were above 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) and the composite reliabilities for all latent factors were greater than 0.70, thereby providing evidence of adequate reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

Table I Correlations and descriptive statistics

Variable	EMP	LIST	ADAPT	PA	NA	ERP	IRP	SEXP	AGE	GEN
EMP	*0.84*									
LIST	0.63**	*0.84*								
ADAPT	0.47**	0.47**	*0.79*							
PA	0.22**	0.24**	0.25**	*0.79*						
NA	−0.18*	−0.23**	−0.20**	−0.22*	*0.83*					
ERP	0.24**	0.33**	0.26**	0.24**	−0.21*	*0.84*				
IRP	0.30**	0.36**	0.41**	0.33**	−0.30**	0.17*	*0.81*			
SEXP	−0.04	−0.04	−0.02	−0.17	−0.03	−0.19*	0.04	_		
AGE	−0.10	−0.10	−0.07	−0.18	−0.09	−0.16*	−0.04	0.79**	_	
GEN	−0.09	−0.01	0.06	0.06	−0.05	−0.03	−0.02	−0.13	−0.07	_
MEAN	6.07	6.09	5.72	4.91	2.27	6.47	5.83	46.40	19.83	_
SD	0.58	0.48	0.67	0.64	1.00	0.54	0.65	8.60	9.35	_
CR	0.88	0.88	0.89	0.89	0.91	0.88	0.91	_	_	_

Notes: *Correlations significant at $\alpha \leq 0.05$; **Correlations significant at $\alpha \leq 0.01$. EMP = Salesperson Empathy, LIST = Salesperson Listening, ADAPT = Adaptive Selling, PA = Positive Affect, NA = Negative Affect, ERP = Extra-Role Performance, IRP = In-Role performance, SEXP = Sales Experience, AGE = Age of salespersons, GEN = Gender SD = Standard Deviation, CR = Composite Reliability. *Square roots of average variance extracted (AVE) shown on diagonal*

Table II Measurement items

Construct name and indicators	Indicator loadings
Salesperson empathy (adapted from Stock and Hoyer, 2005)	
Cronbach's alpha = 0.79, AVE = 0.70	
I have the highest level of empathy with respect to needs of customers	0.80
I find it easy to adapt my perspective to customers	0.88
I am able to adapt my interaction to customer needs in different situations	0.83
Salesperson listening behavior (adapted from Ramsey and Sohi, 1997)	
Cronbach's alpha = 0.80, AVE = 0.71	
Sensing dimension	
I focus only on the customer	0.65
I keep firm eye contact	0.87
I look for non-verbal gestures suggesting he/she is listening to me	0.77
Evaluating dimension	
I ask for more details	0.70
I paraphrase my questions at the customer's request *(dropped).*	0.47
I do not interrupt them	0.76
I do not change the subject too frequently	0.75
I try hard to understand what the customer was saying	0.79
Responding dimension	
I use full sentences instead of saying yes or no. *(dropped)*	0.55
I offer relevant information to questions asked by the customer	0.84
I show eagerness about customer responses	0.81
I answer questions at the appropriate time	0.88
Adaptive selling (adapted from Robinson *et al.*, 2002)	
Cronbach's alpha = 0.85, AVE = 0.62	
When I feel that my sales approach is not working, I can easily change to another approach	0.78
I like to experiment with different sales approaches	0.71
I am very flexible in the selling approach that I use	0.86
I can easily use a wide variety of selling approaches	0.88
I try to understand how one customer differs from another	0.71
Positive affect (adapted from Richins, 1997)	
Cronbach's alpha = 0.85, AVE = 0.62	
During my visits with customers I often feel:	
Gleeful	0.78
Elated	0.82
Delighted	0.84
Enthused	0.74
Happy	0.74
Negative affect (adapted from Richins, 1997)	
Cronbach's alpha = 0.79, AVE = 0.68	
During my visits with customers I often feel:	
Angry	0.76
Discontented	0.77
Nervous	0.83
Stressed	0.90
Anxious	0.86
Extra-role performance (adapted from Netemeyer *et al.*, 2005)	
Cronbach's alpha = 0.79, AVE = 0.70	
I go above and beyond the "call of duty" when serving my customers	0.77
I am willing to go out of my way to make a customer satisfied	0.89
I voluntarily assist customers even if it means going beyond job requirements	0.85

(*continued*)

Table II

Construct name and indicators	Indicator loadings
In-role performance (adapted from Evans *et al.*, 2007)	
Cronbach's alpha = 0.87, AVE = 0.66	
***I am very effective at*:**	
When it comes to contributing to (Company Name)'s market share	0.76
When it comes to making sales of those products with the highest profit margins. *(dropped)*	0.55
When it comes to generating a high level of dollar sales	0.90
When it comes to quickly generating sales of new (Company Name)'s products	0.79
When it comes to identifying major accounts in my territory and selling to them	0.77
When it comes to exceeding sales targets and objectives during the year	0.85
Socially desirable responding (adapted from Donavan *et al.*, 2004)	
Cronbach's alpha = 0.87, AVE = 0.57	
There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone	0.72
I sometimes try to get even rather than forget	0.81
At times I have really insisted on having things my way	0.69
I like to gossip at times	0.80

Note: AVE = average variance extracted

Convergent validity was established by the fact that average variance extracted for all latent constructs in the model exceeded 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and discriminant validity was established by the fact that the AVE for each latent construct exceeded the squared correlation between each pair of constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Structural model

Partial least squares analysis (PLS) was conducted to test the study's hypotheses. PLS is considered an alternative to covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) in that it "maximizes the explained variance of the endogenous latent variables by estimating partial model relationships in an iterative sequence of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions" (Hair *et al.*, 2012, p. 415). As data were collected from salespeople, it is possible that the self-reported responses may be biased because of the method of measurement. Common method variance has been shown to increase or decrease the correlations between constructs if they are measured using the same method and participants (Cote and Buckley, 1987). One technique that is used to address the possibility of common method variance bias is the marker variable method (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). The marker variable approach is utilized to isolate any variance attributed to the method bias. Although the marker variable method was initially developed for studies using CB-SEM, it has also been found to be effective in studies using PLS analysis (Rönkkö and Ylitalo, 2011). In this study, we used "socially desirable responding" as the marker variable with items adapted from Donavan *et al.* (2004). Previous research has demonstrated that personality variables are often used as marker variables (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

Our PLS analysis was conducted using WarpPLS 5.0 software with PLS Mode A algorithm and the Stable3 resampling method. Stable3 is a resampling method proprietary to the WarpPLS software and generally provides more accurate calculated probability required for rejecting the null hypothesis (p-values) and standard errors than using a bootstrapping resampling method (Kock, 2014). The model converged on a solution after six iterations. Two models were tested, one model without the marker variable and another model with the marker variable. In both models, salesperson listening was modeled as a second-order construct (Kock, 2011), where the subscale dimensions of listening (sensing, evaluating and responding) are modeled as first-order indicators of salesperson listening (second-order construct). The results of both models are shown in Table III. The path coefficients of the hypothesized relationships remained significant in both models, which demonstrates that common method variance does not bias the results in this study.

Table III illustrates the results of the PLS analysis. The results show that salesperson empathy is positively and significantly related to listening ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$) and adaptive selling behaviors ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for *H1* and *H2*. Support was found for the positive relationship between listening and adaptive selling behaviors ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$), corroborating *H3*. Similarly, listening had a positive impact on salesperson in-role performance ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$) and extra-role performance ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$) in support of *H4* and *H5*. The PLS results also show that adaptive selling behavior is positively related to salesperson in-role performance ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$) and salesperson extra-role performance ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.02$), providing support for *H6* and *H7*.

We hypothesized that positive affect will strengthen the effects of salesperson empathy on salesperson listening and adaptive selling behaviors, while negative affect will weaken the effects of salesperson empathy on salesperson listening and adaptive selling behaviors. The results show that positive affect strengthens the effects of empathy on listening ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$), in support of *H8*. As predicted, a simple slopes graph of the interaction effects indicates that the relationship between empathy and listening behavior is stronger for salespeople high in positive

Table III PLS hypothesis testing results

Hypothesized paths	Model 1 β	Model 1 R^2	Model 1 VIF	Model 2 β	Model 2 R^2	Model 2 VIF
Model R^2		0.29			0.29	
H1 **Empathy → Listening**	0.61**	-	1.08	6.22**	-	1.06
H2 **Empathy → Adaptive Selling**	0.32**	-	1.78	0.32**	-	1.76
H3 **Listening → Adaptive Selling**	0.21**	-	1.93	0.22**	-	1.88
H4 **Listening → In-Role Performance**	0.20*	-	1.34	0.20*	-	1.29
H5 **Listening → Extra-Role Performance**	0.23**	-	1.34	0.26**	-	1.29
H6 **Adaptive Selling → In-Role Performance**	0.31**	-	1.30	0.32**	-	1.30
H7 **Adaptive Selling → Extra-Role Performance**	0.14*	-	1.30	0.14	-	1.30
H8 **Empathy × Positive Affect → Listening**	0.26**	-	1.10	0.28**	-	1.08
H9 **Empathy × Positive Affect → Adaptive Selling**	0.19*	-	1.23	0.20*	-	1.22
H10 **Empathy × Negative Affect → Listening**	0.09	-	1.14	0.11	-	1.13
H11 **Empathy × Negative Affect → Adaptive Selling**	0.04	-	1.16	0.04	-	1.15

Notes: *Paths significant at $\alpha \leq 0.05$; **Paths significant at $\alpha \leq 0.001$; Model 1 = Model with marker variable; Model 2 = Model without marker variable; VIF = variance inflation factor

affectivity than for salespeople low in positive affectivity (Figure 2). *H9* predicted that positive affect would moderate the relationship between empathy and adaptive selling behavior. As expected, a significant interaction between empathy and positive affect on adaptive selling was found ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.002$) in support of *H9*. The interaction was plotted in Figure 3. The data pattern reveals that when positive affect is high, the impact of empathy on adaptive selling is stronger. On the other hand, negative affect did moderate neither the relationship between empathy and listening ($\beta = 0.09$, $p = 0.09$), nor the relationship between empathy and adaptive selling behaviors ($\beta = 0.04$, $p = 0.29$). Therefore, *H10* and *H11* were not supported. The analysis demonstrated that salesperson listening and adaptive selling behaviors accounted for 22 and 17 per cent of the variance in salesperson in-role and extra-role performance, respectively. Empathy and the moderating role of affect accounted for 48 and 30 per cent of the variance in salesperson listening and adaptive selling behaviors, respectively.

Figure 2 Positive affect (PA) as a moderator of the relationship between empathy and listening

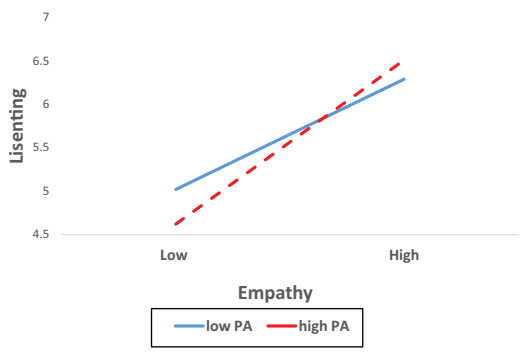
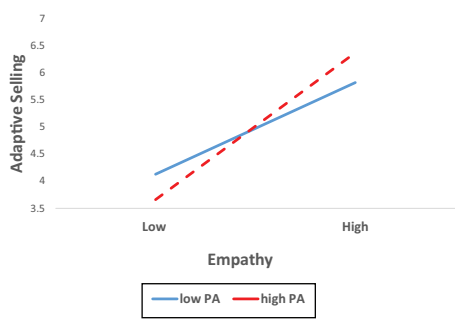


Figure 3 Positive affect (PA) as a moderator of the relationship between empathy and adaptive selling



Discussion and implications

Traditional and existing views on sales performance have predominantly focused on cognitive models (Churchill *et al.*, 1985; MacKenzie *et al.*, 1998), ignoring emotional arguments in discussions of salesperson performance. The current study responds to the recent call for more research on the role of emotion in B2B marketing (Bagozzi, 2006). Specifically, we address this gap by examining an emotional model of performance that is grounded in the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotion. Interestingly, this study is among the first in the B2B literature to explore the relationship between empathy and affectivity as a means of explaining sales performance. In response to the identified lack of research on empathy within a sales context, we provide unique insights into understanding how social emotions interact with positive states to create external behavioral outcomes directed toward buyers and firms. This underscores an important discovery in the B2B sales context, which is founded on the notion that logical actions by salespeople can be driven equally by positive social emotions and affective states. This counters years of sales research (Churchill *et al.*, 1985; Weitz *et al.*, 1986), which contends that salespeople's behaviors and performances are motivated mainly by reason, external factors (such as sales management variables), and cognition (abilities, training and knowledge) and not by emotion. While our research findings do not negate the role of reason, they do support the inclusion of emotions and affect in future B2B sales models.

The goal of this study was to examine the process through which empathy influences in-role and extra-role performance. Several conclusions that advance current research and practice in B2B sales are drawn. First, as expected, the findings indicate that the impact of empathy on performance flows through effective active listening and adaptive selling behaviors. Our findings support the theoretical assumptions posed by the broaden-and-build theory, which submits that positive emotions broaden the thoughts and actions of salespeople, thus making them more capable of utilizing social, intellectual, psychological and physical resources. While several studies in the marketing discipline have drawn on the broaden-and-build theory as the theoretical basis for reasoned human action (Barnes and Collier, 2013; Louro *et al.*, 2005), we are aware of only one study in the B2B literature that explored salesperson positive emotion using the same theoretical framework. Together with the Verbeke *et al.* (2004) investigation of salesperson pride and hubris (alpha pride) as positive self-conscious emotional stimulants of action tendencies, the present study represents the only other research to explain what happens in a sales relationship once salespeople experience positive emotions along with empathy . In addition, we consider and integrate the moderating effects of positive and negative affect on the relationship between empathy and action tendencies toward buyers. As revealed in the findings, incorporating affective states into an empathy-based model produces more valid results that advance knowledge in B2B marketing.

Similar to pride (Verbeke *et al.*, 2004), empathy has broadening characteristics. Specifically, we found that the interactive impact of empathy and affect accounts for a substantial amount of variance (48 and 30 per cent) in salesperson listening and adaptive selling, respectively. We have shown that empathy, as an emotion, has beneficial effects and that the effects are strengthened by positive affective states. The results also show that empathy increases performance through changes in salesperson listening abilities and willingness to adapt one's selling style to various buyer needs. In this regard, while Comer and Drollinger (1999) recommend empathetic listening, we recommend empathic selling as the bottom line consideration that must be implemented in future performance models to account for increased sales behaviors. Our results indicate that negative affect does not moderate the relationship between empathy and listening as well as adaptive selling behavior, which demonstrates that negative affect may not possess the undoing effects to negate the influences of positive emotions. In addition, the stressful nature of a salesperson's job can likely undermine the moderating effect of negative affect on the link between empathy and sales behaviors.

Finally, our contributions advance current research in the area of discretionary sales performance by offering a key finding. We demonstrate that positive social emotions are capable of increasing buyer-directed action tendencies in an indirect way through adaptive selling and active listening that entails sensing, processing and responding. The findings embrace the viewpoint purported in past studies that listening entails cognitive, emotional and behavioral components (Bergeron and Laroche, 2009). Our results show that the cognitive (sensing) and emotional components (processing) of listening coincide strongly with taking and understanding the buyer's perspective, while the behavioral component (responding) drives adaptive selling behaviors.

Managerial implications

With regard to the managerial implications of the study, we stress that impression management through empathy building exercises should be one of a firm's priority actions during training sessions. Empathy must be emphasized as a relationship-building tool necessary to foster performance. If sales companies can leverage a salesperson's emotional competence as a means of improving salesperson listening and adaptive selling, then managers must strongly consider the implementation of empathic selling. Impressing on salespeople the importance of empathy can be achieved through managerial efforts that openly reward and motivate empathic selling. Empathic selling is a powerful sales approach that requires a shift in the way organizations view selling from a rational perspective to more of an emotional approach by appealing to a buyer's central desire, that is, the way they feel and react. For this reason, firms need to invest time and resources to identify, understand and attend to the emotions that salespeople should manifest during the sales process. In this way, firms can reorient their human resources and sales strategies with the aim to enhance positive emotions and, consequently, generate better sales results.

Based on the aforementioned recommendation, the main focus for sales managers should be redirected to empathy training with a strong spotlight on how emotions can impact sales performance (sales, evaluation and internal promotion). However, these managers and supervisors themselves need to be trained on how to assess emotions and the level of importance accorded to the utilization of empathy and other relevant emotions. Sales and marketing managers must be trained on how to manifest empathy towards salespeople during role-playing sessions.

Finally, providing backup social support systems should be a priority in the day-to-day work of the firm. When a salesperson faces situations that create negative affect, there should be a backup social support system. Emotional social support tools such as mentorship programs can help the salesperson recover and tune into his or her positive affect. This will favor the firm in such critical moments.

Limitations and future research

We should emphasize that this study makes no attempt to examine the different types of empathy found in the psychology literature, including perspective taking, empathic concern and emotional contagion. On the contrary, the three indicators used in capturing empathy collectively address empathy as a whole. As a result, interpreting empathy as a single-dimensional variable must proceed with caution, noting that various dimensions of empathy may reveal differential effects on salesperson behaviors. That being said, future studies on empathy should investigate salesperson empathy from a multidimensional perspective, similar to the McBane (1995) study.

Our use of cross-sectional data impedes us from drawing conclusion about causal inferences. This would require longitudinal data that allow researchers to observe the changes in

empathy over time and how it influences relevant outcomes. It is possible that empathy changes over time and varies according to sales situations. Therefore, further research could explore a smaller set of salespeople over a nine-month period to identify whether there are certain triggers of empathy and to determine the extent to which time impacts outcomes of empathy.

Furthermore, there are limitations associated with the generalizability of the findings. Because our study was tested with a sample of salespeople from one industry and company, the results should be interpreted with discretion. While the context of the study was ideal for the present investigation, future studies must attempt to examine empathy across various sales situations in B2B markets. Although common method variance was found not to bias our results, obtaining performance level data from managers is a sure way to prevent variance inflation resulting from self-reporting.

Conclusion

More scholars Bagozzi (2006), and Erevelles and Fukawa (2013) are calling for greater research on the largely overlooked impact of empathy and affect on salesperson behavior and performance. The present study addresses this gap and by so doing contributes to the marketing literature in a direct effort to comprehend the role of emotions in B2B sales. Over the years, numerous research studies in B2B marketing have made the argument that rationality is needed to increase salesperson behavior and performance. While research shows us that salespeople respond well to logic, facts and motivational stimuli, the results from this study reveal that emotions also drive sales performance. This unequivocally indicates that salespeople ought to consider utilizing and responding to positive emotional triggers while selling. We, therefore, conclude that positive emotions are related to buyer and firm-directed goal achievements in the form of adaptive selling, active listening and higher performance.

Note

1 Emotions are directed at something; affect is not essentially directed at something (Russell, 2009).

References

Aggarwal, P., Castleberry, S.B., Ridnour, R. and Shepherd, C.D. (2005), "Salesperson empathy and listening: impact on relationship outcomes", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 16-31.

Ahearne, M., Jelinek, R. and Jones, E. (2007), "Examining the effect of salesperson service behavior in a competitive context", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 603-616.

Bagozzi, R. (2006), "The role of social and self-conscious emotions in the regulation of business-to-business relationships in salesperson-customer interactions", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 21 No. 7, pp. 453-457.

Bagozzi, R.P., Belschak, F. and Verbeke, W. (2010), "The role of emotional wisdom in salespersons' relationships with colleagues and customers", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 27 No. 11, pp. 1001-1031.

Barnes, D.C. and Collier, J.E. (2013), "Investigating work engagement in the service environment", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 27 No. 6, pp. 485-499.

Bergeron, J. and Laroche, M. (2009), "The effects of perceived salesperson listening effectiveness in the financial industry", *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 6-25.

Boorom, M.L., Goolsby, J.R. and Ramsey, R.P. (1998), "Relational communication traits and their effect on adaptiveness and sales performance", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 16-30.

Bradburn, N.M. (1969), *The structure of psychological well-being*, Aldine, Chicago.

Burney, L.L., Henle, C.A. and Widener, S.K. (2009), "A path model examining the relations among strategic performance measurement system characteristics, organizational justice, and extra-and in-role performance", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 305-321.

Castleberry, S.B., Ridnour, R. and Shepherd, C.D. (2004), "Salesperson listening: a replication and extension of the ILPS scale", *Journal of Applied Business Research*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 23-31.

Churchill, G.A., Jr., Ford, N.M., Hartley, S.W. and Walker, O. C. Jr. (1985), "The determinants of salesperson performance: a Meta-analysis", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 103-118.

Comer, L.B. and Drollinger, T. (1999), "Active empathetic listening and selling success: a conceptual framework", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 15-29.

Cote, J.A. and Buckley, M. (1987), "Estimating trait, method, and error variance: generalizing across 70 construct validation studies", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 315-318.

Cropanzano, R., James, K. and Konovsky, M.A. (1993), "Dispositional affectivity as a predictor of work attitudes and job performance", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 14 No. 6, pp. 595-606.

Donavan, D.T., Brown, T.J. and Mowen, J.C. (2004), "Internal benefits of service-worker customer orientation: job satisfaction, commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 128-146.

Eisenberg, N. and Miller, P.A. (1987), "The relation of empathy to prosocial and related behaviors", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 101 No. 1, pp. 91-119.

Ekkekakis, P. (2012), "The measurement of affect, mood, and emotion in exercise psychology", in Tenenbaum, G., Eklund, R.C. and Kamata, A. (Eds), *Measurement in Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL, pp. 321-332.

Erevelles, S. and Fukawa, N. (2013), "The role of affect in personal selling and sales management", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 7-24.

Evans, K.R., Landry, T.D., Li, P. and Zou, S. (2007), "How sales controls affect job-related outcomes: the role of organizational sales-related psychological climate perceptions", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 35 No. 3, pp. 445-459.

Fornell, C. and Larcker, D.F. (1981), "Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 39-50.

Fosha, D. (2005), "Emotion, true self, true other, core state: toward a clinical theory of affective change process", *Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 92 No. 4, pp. 513-551.

Franke, G.R. and Park, J. (2006), "Salesperson adaptive selling behavior and customer orientation: a Meta-analysis", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 43 No. 4, pp. 693-702.

Fredrickson, B.L. (2001), "The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 56 No. 3, pp. 218-226.

Fredrickson, B.L. and Branigan, C. (2005), "Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires", *Cognition and Emotions*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 313-332.

Fredrickson, B.L. and Joiner, T. (2002), "Positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being", *Psychological Science*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 172-175.

Fredrickson, B.L. and Losada, M.F. (2005), "Positive affect and the complex dynamics of human flourishing", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 60 No. 7, pp. 678-686.

Fredrickson, B.L., Mancuso, R.A., Branigan, C. and Tugade, M.M. (2000), "The undoing effect of positive emotions", *Motivation and Emotion*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 237-258.

George, J.M. (1991), "State or trait: effects of positive mood on prosocial behaviors at work", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 76 No. 2, pp. 299-307.

George, J.M. (1998), "Salesperson and mood at work: implications for helping customers", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 23-30.

Hair, J.F., Hult, G., Ringle, C. and Sarstedt, M. (2014), *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Modeling (PLS-SEM)*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Hair, J.F., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C.M. and Mena, J.A. (2012), "An assessment of the use of partial least squares structural equation modeling in marketing research", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 414-434.

Håkansson, J. and Montgomery, H. (2003), "Empathy as an interpersonal phenomenon", *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 267-284.

Homburg, C., Wieseke, J. and Bornemann, T. (2009), "Implementing the marketing concept at the employee-customer interface: the role of customer need knowledge", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 73 No. 4, pp. 64-81.

Isen, A.M. (2000), "Positive affect and decision making", in Lewis, M. and Haviland-Jones, J.M. (Eds), *Handbook of Emotions*, 2nd ed., The Guilford Press, NY, pp. 417-435.

Isen, A.M. (2008), "Some ways in which positive affect influences decision making and problem solving", in Lewis, M., Haviland-Jones, J.M. and Barrett, L.F. (Eds), *Handbook of Emotions*, 3rd ed., The Guilford Press, NY, pp. 548-573.

Jaramillo, F., Locander, W.B., Spector, P.E. and Harris, E.G. (2007), "Getting the job done: the moderating role of initiative on the relationship between intrinsic motivation and adaptive selling", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 59-74.

Judge, T.A., Erez, A. and Bono, J.E. (1998), "The power of being positive: the relation between positive self-concept and job performance", *Human Performance*, Vol. 11 Nos 2/3, pp. 167-187.

Keillor, B.D., Parker, R.S. and Pettijohn, C.E. (1999), "Sales force performance satisfaction and aspects of relational selling: implications for sales managers", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 101-115.

Kock, N. (2011), "Using WarpPLS in e-collaboration studies: an overview", *International Journal of e-Collaboration*", Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 1-13.

Kock, N. (2014), "Advanced mediating effects tests, multi-group analyses, and measurement model assessments in PLS-based SEM", *International Journal of e-Collaboration*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 1-13.

Lindell, M.K. and Whitney, D.J. (2001), "Accounting for common method variance in cross-sectional research designs", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 86 No. 1, pp. 114-121.

Louro, M.J., Pieters, R. and Zeelenberg, M. (2005), "Negative returns on positive emotions: the influences of pride and self-regulatory goals in repurchase decisions", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 833-840.

Marshall, G.W., Goebel, D.J. and Moncrief, W.C. (2003), "Hiring for success at the buyer–seller interface", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 56 No. 4, pp. 247-255.

McBane, D. (1995), "Empathy and the salesperson: a multidimensional perspective", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 349-370.

MacKenzie, S.B., Podsakoff, P.M. and Ahearne, M. (1998), "Some possible antecedents and consequences of in-role and extra-role salesperson performance", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 62 No. 3, pp. 87-98.

McNeely, B.L. and Meglino, B.M. (1994), "The role of dispositional and situational antecedents in prosocial organizational behavior: an examination of the intended beneficiaries of prosocial behavior", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 79 No. 6, pp. 836-844.

Morelli, S.A., Lieberman, M.D. and Zaki, J. (2015), "The emerging study of positive empathy", *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 57-68.

Netemeyer, R.G., Maxham III, J.G. and Pullig, C. (2005), "Conflicts in the work-family interface: links to job stress, customer service employee performance, and customer purchase intent", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 69 No. 2, pp. 130-143.

Nunnally, J. (1978), *Psychometric Theory*, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.

Orr, J.M., Sackett, P.R. and Mercer, M. (1989), "The role of prescribed and nonprescribed behaviors in estimating the dollar value of performance", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 74 No. 1, pp. 34-40.

Pilling, B.K. and Eroglu, S. (1994), "An empirical examination of the impact of salesperson empathy and professionalism and merchandise salability on retail buyers' evaluations", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 45-58.

Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B., Lee, J. and Podsakoff, N.P. (2003), "Common method biases in behavioral research: a

critical review of the literature and recommended remedies", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 88 No. 5, pp. 879-903.

Pryor, S., Malshe, A. and Paradise, K. (2013), "Salesperson listening in the extended sales relationship: an exploration of cognitive, affective, and temporal dimensions", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 185-196.

Ramsey, R.P. and Sohi, R.S. (1997), "Listening to your customers: the impact of perceived salesperson listening behavior on relationship outcomes", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 127-137.

Richins, M.L. (1997), "Measuring emotions in the consumption experience", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 127-146.

Robinson, L., Jr., Marshall, G.W., Moncrief, W.C. and Lassk, F.G. (2002), "Toward a shortened measure of adaptive selling", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 111-118.

Rojell, E.J., Pettijohn, C.E. and Parker, R.S. (2006), "Emotional intelligence and dispositional affectivity as predictors of performance in salespeople", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 113-124.

Román, S. (2014), "Salesperson's listening in buyer–seller service relationships", *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 34 No. 7, pp. 630-644.

Roman, S. and Iacobucci, D. (2010), "Antecedents and consequences of adaptive selling confidence and behavior: a dyadic analysis of salespeople and their customers", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 363-382.

Rönkkö, M. and Ylitalo, J. (2011), "PLS marker variable approach to diagnosing and controlling for method variance", *Proceedings of the Thirty Second International Conference on Information Systems, ICIS, Shanghai*, pp. 1-16.

Russell, J.A. (2009), "Emotion, core affect, and psychological construction", *Cognition and Emotion*, Vol. 23 No. 7, pp. 1259-1283.

Scherer, K.R. (1984), "Emotion as a multicomponent process: a model and some cross-cultural data", *Review of Personality & Social Psychology*, Vol. 5, pp. 37-63.

Scherer, K.R. (1997), "The role of culture in emotion-antecedent appraisal", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 73 No. 5, pp. 902-922.

Sekerka, L.E. and Fredrickson, B.L. (2008), "Establishing positive emotional climates to advance organizational transformation", in Ashkanasy, N.M. and Cooper, C.L. (Eds), *Research Companion to Emotion in Organizations*, Edward Edgar Publishing, Northampton, MA, pp. 531-545.

Singh, R. and Venugopal, P. (2015), "The impact of salesperson customer orientation on sales performance via mediating mechanism", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 30 No. 5, pp. 594-607.

Smith, C.A. and Ellsworth, P.C. (1985), "Patterns of cognitive appraisal in emotion", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 48 No. 4, pp. 813-838.

Spaulding, D.G. and Plank, R.E. (2007), "Selling automobiles at retail: is empathy important?", *Marketing Management Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 142-155.

Stock, R.M. and Hoyer, W.D. (2005), "An attitude-behavior model of salespeople's customer orientation", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 536-552.

Tugade, M.M. and Fredrickson, B.L. (2004), "Resilient individuals use positive emotions to bounce back from negative emotional experiences", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 86 No. 2, pp. 320-333.

Tugade, M.M., Fredrickson, B.L. and Feldman Barrett, L. (2004), "Psychological resilience and positive emotional granularity: examining the benefits of positive emotions on coping and health", *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 72 No. 6, pp. 1161-1190.

Vacharkulksemsuk, T., Sekerka, L.E. and Fredrickson, B.L. (2011), "Establishing a positive emotional climate to create 21st -century organizational change", in Ashkanasy, N.M., Wilderom, C.P.M. and Peterson, MF. (Eds), *The Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate*, 2nd edition, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 101-118.

Verbeke, W. and Bagozzi, R.P. (2003), "Exploring the role of self- and customer-provoked embarrassment in personal selling", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 233-258.

Verbeke, W., Belschak, F. and Bagozzi, R.P. (2004), "The adaptive consequences of pride in personal selling", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 386-402.

Watson, D. and Clark, L.A. (1984), "Negative affectivity: the disposition to experience aversive emotional states", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 96 No. 3, pp. 465-490.

Watson, D. and Clark, L.A. (1997), "The measurement and mismeasurement of mood: recurrent and emergent issues", *Journal of Personality Assessment*, Vol. 68 No. 2, pp. 267-296.

Watson, D., Clark, L.A. and Tellegen, A. (1988), "Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: the PANAS scales", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 54 No. 6, pp. 1063-1070.

Weitz, B.A., Sujan, H. and Sujan, M. (1986), "Knowledge, motivation, and adaptive behavior: a framework for improving selling effectiveness", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 50 No. 4, pp. 174-191.

Wieseke, J., Geigenmüller, A. and Kraus, F. (2012), "On the role of empathy in customer-employee interactions", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 316-331.

Wondra, J. and Ellsworth, P. (2015), "An appraisal theory of empathy and other vicarious emotional experiences", *Psychological Review*, Vol. 122 No. 3, pp. 411-428.

Young, L. and Albaum, G. (2003), "Measurement of trust in salesperson–customer relationships in direct selling", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 253-269.

Corresponding author

Nwamaka A. Anaza can be contacted at: nanaza@siu.edu