What are Likes Worth? A Facebook Field Experiment
Daniel Mochon, PhD, Karen Johnson, PhD, Janet Schwartz, PhD, and Dan Ariely, PhD

Pricing Strategies: The Difference of a Digit
Lingjiang Lora Tu, PhD and Chris Pullig, PhD

Boundary Conditions of Ethical Leadership: Stress as a Potential Inhibitor
Matthew J. Quade, PhD, Sara Jansen Perry, PhD, and Emily M. Hunter, PhD

Salesperson Ambidexterity and Customer Satisfaction
Raj Agnihotri, PhD, Colin B. Gabler, PhD, Omar S. Itani, PhD, Fernando Jaramillo, PhD, and Michael T. Krush, PhD

The Influence of Political Skill on Sales Outcomes
Jie Li, PhD, Gong Sun, PhD, and Zhiming Cheng, PhD

Maximizing Your Social Media Marketing
Kevin Pettit, MBA Candidate

INSIDER: When—The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing
Clint Ratliff, MBA Candidate

INSIDER: Sales Insanity
Jorge Trevino, MBA Candidate
While sales productivity will always be paramount to a competitive advantage, now, more than ever, salespeople must also focus on service quality and effectiveness to meet increased customer demands (Bowen & Schneider 2014). To remain competitive, salespeople must provide excellent service while still reaching their sales quotas (Agnihotri et al. 2012; Ahearne, Jelinek, & Jones 2007). When these two ideas converge, sales-service ambidexterity is achieved. But how can sales managers encourage their sales associates to reach this medium? And what difficulties will sales associates experience along the way?

Our Study

Because sales and service goals can often be inherently at odds with each another, we focused on the possibility of both positive and negative effects. Building from control theory and resource allocation logic, we developed a model that tested two main questions. First, does sales-service ambidexterity enable salespeople to better customize and tailor their interactions to customer needs? Second, do these dual expectations yield an internal inconsistency or erratic shift of work focus?

Our research examined whether ambidexterity enabled one of the most prized behaviors in the salesperson’s arsenal (i.e. adaptability), yet created the opportunity for discontent with one’s role (i.e. role conflict). In addition, we incorporated customer demandingness as a contingency variable (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Boles 2013) to help shed light onto how customer expectations shaped these relationships. Customer demandingness, as a moderator, provided insight into whether an exacting customer environment strengthened or weakened the relationship between ambidexterity and both the positive (adaptive selling) and negative (role conflict) outcomes. Further, we use control theory to understand the underlying rationale for the dual outcomes emanating from the salesperson’s level of ambidexterity. The theoretical framework highlights the means by which individuals allocate resources toward multiple, simultaneously held goals (VandeWalle et al. 1999), as well as the downside of such a resource allocation.
We employed an international market research company to collect salespeople and customer data across a wide range of B2B companies and industries. The sample of sales professionals was randomly chosen from a group of targeted companies. Each salesperson provided a list of his/her customers, from which we randomly selected one name and invited his or her participation. The customers were asked to report their satisfaction with the salesperson.

**Findings & Implications**

The results of our study showed a positive relationship between sales-service ambidexterity and adaptive selling behavior. Likewise, there is a positive relationship between sales-service ambidexterity and role conflict. A working relationship driven by the integration of pushing sales growth while maintaining high levels of customer service provides the seller with a solid foundation for dealing with a variety of customer types and needs. Those sellers who experience lower levels of role conflict (or simply handle role conflict more efficiently) are better suited for adaptive selling at the discretion of their customers.

Our research also found a statistically significant negative relationship between role conflict and customer satisfaction for the salesperson. This makes sense in that, as the level of role conflict experienced by the sales person increases, s/he may find difficulty in adequately satisfying the needs of the customer. Connected to this finding, we uncovered a positive relationship (non-hypothesized) between ambidexterity and customer satisfaction. The level of role conflict in these relationships served as the determining factor for overall customer satisfaction.

We examined the effect of customer demandingness on the relationships between both ambidexterity and adaptive selling as well as ambidexterity and role conflict. The findings show that customer demandingness interacts with sales-service ambidexterity to positively impact adaptive selling behavior and role conflict. The more demanding a customer group is, the more role conflict a salesperson experiences, thus encouraging higher levels of adapting selling behaviors.

**Application**

Organizations are striving to implement overarching corporate strategies that focus on both service provision and sales generation. Firms that demand that their salesforce excels in both sales and service may find a series of positive and/or unexpected outcomes (Mittal et al. 2005). The key for managers is to understand their firm’s strategic objectives and how best to structure their salesforce to reach these objectives. For instance, in our research, salesperson ambidexterity impacted both adaptiveness (a positive outcome) and role conflict (a negative outcome). Thus, the adoption and organization-wide embrace of ambidexterity warrants careful consideration. We submit that firms must articulate the role of the salesforce. Will it be tasked with role specialization or role ambidexterity? The key for managers is to understand their firm’s strategic objectives and how best to structure their salesforce to reach these objectives.
Second, if the firm requires ambidexterity from its salesforce, this undoubtedly entails a rearrangement of employee priorities and resources (Piercy 2010), as well as the acquisition of additional competences among salespeople (Kindström, Kowalkowski, & Alejandro 2015). Hence, organizations expecting greater ambidexterity from their salesforce should proactively consider the investment required for training their sales teams while acclimatizing their managers to the shift in strategic focus (Kauppila, Rajala, & Jyrämä 2010).

Third, the relationship between salesperson ambidexterity and role conflict should be highlighted. Hence, increasing expectations of ambidexterity placed on the salesforce may impose a physical and psychological toll on employees, which eventually manifests itself with negative performance effects (Gibson & Birkinshaw 2004; Jasmand, Blazevic, & de Ruyter 2012). Thus, the sales manager needs to understand how to equip his/her salesforce to meet the resource demands required by ambidexterity. The properly equipped salesperson may be more able to effectively manage his or her resources to meet the demands inherently required of ambidexterity.

Fourth, managers should be mindful of the market environment in which their salesforce operates. The customers who possess greater expectations from their ambidextrous salesperson actually facilitate higher levels of adaptive selling techniques. Alternatively, the more demanding the customers are, the greater the role conflict experienced by the ambidextrous salesperson. With this knowledge, managers could proactively work with their ambidextrous salesforce to mitigate role conflict. When the sales manager becomes aware that a salesperson is serving a customer or group of customers with increasing demands, the manager could either: (a) provide the salesperson with proactive support to reduce role conflict or, (b) potentially transition the customer to a salesperson who better handles role conflict. By reducing the opportunity for role conflict, the manager would effectively be increasing the potential for customer satisfaction with his/her salesforce.

**Conclusion**

Because firms must balance revenue generation with customer retention, salespeople are expected to maintain multiple goals and behaviors, namely sales generation and service provision. Our research examined how sales-service ambidexterity can address this new business landscape. We applied control theory and resource allocation logic to examine the possible
friction stemming from sales-service ambidexterity. We modeled and tested customer-salesperson dyadic data to offer an empirical examination of how this friction manifests through both positive and negative outcomes.

**Recommended Reading**


**References**


About the Authors

**Raj Agnihotri, PhD**  
Dean’s Fellow in Marketing and Director of Sales Initiative, Iowa State University

Dr. Raj Agnihotri (PhD – Kent State University) has published over 35 articles in leading scholarly journals and currently serves on the editorial review board of several reputed journals. Dr. Agnihotri has received numerous accolades for his research including the Comer Award for best contribution to sales theory, Best Article 2016 from *Industrial Marketing Management*, Citation of Excellence 2017 from Emerald Publishing, Neil Rackham Research Grant from Sales Education Foundation, Bright Idea Award from NJPRO Foundation, and Best Dissertation 2010 from American Marketing Association/Sales SIG.

Before entering academia, Raj held a number of sales and marketing positions with startup ventures to major corporations and currently serves on the advisory boards of technology startups based in US and Europe. He has given sales seminars to industry professionals from North America, Brazil, Europe, and India.

**Colin B. Gabler, PhD**  
O’Bleness Associate Professor of Marketing, Ohio University

Dr. Colin Gabler (PhD – University of Alabama) has authored over 20 articles in leading business journals. His research focuses on how organizations manage multiple stakeholders. Specifically, he is interested in when stakeholder values are misaligned and how firms and policy-makers respond to these multiple and often competing goals. His topics of interest include sustainable business strategy, sales/service expectations, retail pricing strategy, consumer psychology, and supply chain resiliency. In 2017, Dr. Gabler won the university-wide Sustainability Research Advocacy Award. In 2015, he won the college-wide Faculty Excellence in Intellectual Contribution Award.

Prior to academia, Colin spent five years in the nonprofit sector, finding time to coach basketball and write for an entertainment magazine.
Omar S. Itani, PhD
Assistant Professor of Marketing, Lebanese American University
Dr. Omar Itani (PhD – The University of Texas Arlington) is actively involved in academic research and has published multiple papers in top marketing journals and participates in leading marketing conferences. His research has been presented at reputable conferences, including the American Marketing Association, Society of Marketing Advances, Marketing Management Association, National Conference of Sales Management, and Global Sales Science Institute. He is affiliated with a multitude of international associations such as the American Marketing Association, the Academy of Marketing Science, and the Beta Gamma Sigma national business honor society.

Fernando Jaramillo, PhD
Chair and Associate Professor of Marketing, The University of Texas at Arlington
Dr. Fernando Jaramillo’s (PhD – University of South Florida) research interests include sales force performance and marketing strategy. His work has been published in several journals including the Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, the International Journal of Research in Marketing, the Journal of Business Research, the Journal of Business Ethics, and Industrial Marketing Management. He is the associate editor of the European Journal of Marketing.

Mike Krush, PhD
Assistant Professor of Marketing, Kansas State University
Dr. Mike Krush (PhD – University of Nebraska-Lincoln) previously served as the Director of the NDSU Center for Professional Selling and Sales Technology—the only academic center dedicated to developing the sales skills of college students within the North Dakota University System. His research interests including strategic marketing issues, marketing capabilities and competencies, and personal sales and sales performance. He has published in journals including the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Business Ethics, Industrial Marketing Management, and the Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management. Prior to his academic career, Dr. Krush served in marketing as a brand manager within a Fortune 500 company. His responsibilities included all areas of strategic marketing for a $600 million brand. In addition, he has consulted with start-up firms, conducted marketing in the financial services domain, and written a book on career preparation.