# Salesperson improvisation: an empirical examination of its consequences and boundaries

Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin

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# Dedication

*To those who gave…*

*Nana Kwadwo Owusu Banin, Paapa Kyerematen-Ansong Banin, Maame Ama Amankwa Banin and Mr Kwadwo Banin…. you make home rock!*

# Abstract

The received wisdom in industrial selling emphasizes systematic approaches where the typical sales scenario comprises prospecting, pre-approach, approach, presentation, handling objections, closing and follow-up. However, times are changing, making such a systematic approach to selling not always optimal. As markets become more unpredictable, salespersons must frequently employ unplanned, spur-of-the-moment responses to be responsive in unexpected and urgent situations. In spite of the pervasiveness of such improvised responses, the literature has yet to account for them. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to investigate the consequences, antecedents and boundaries of salesperson improvisation. From a descriptive decision-making perspective, the study proposes a conceptual model of salesperson improvisation and tests it on a sample of industrial salespersons in Ghana.

Findings support a two-dimensional structure of salesperson improvisation comprising salesperson creativity and spontaneity. Findings also show that the dimensions may have differential implications for sales performance. Salesperson creativity during improvisation may engender sales losses while spontaneity may be related to sales success. However, neither dimension has a significant direct relationship with sales performance. Rather, the paths from creativity and spontaneity to sales performance become activated by resource availability, pressure to perform and individual agency. Resource availability renders the creativity–performance link positive while individual agency makes it negative. On the other hand, given high performance pressures, the positive non-significant path from spontaneity to sales performance assumes a significant negative tone.

The study also finds that the two dimensions differ, to some extent, in the factors that drive them. Self-efficacy drives creativity but reduces spontaneity during improvisation. Experience also reduces spontaneity but has no direct effect on creativity. Salesperson autonomy, however, is a universal driver of both creativity and spontaneity. Implications of these findings for the sales management and improvisation literatures, and for practice are discussed. The researcher also outlines opportunities for future research.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*"An organization which depends solely upon its blueprints of prescribed behaviour is a fragile social system"*.

(Katz, 1964, p. 132)

### 1.1 An overview of the study

This study introduces the concept of salesperson improvisation to the sales literature. Highlighting the critical role of the sales situation in defining salesperson behaviours, the study positions improvisation as a means for responsiveness in unexpected and urgent situations. The study draws from three bodies of literature (sales management, improvisation and decision-making) in articulating this positioning of the construct. It then applies established psychometric and statistical procedures to develop measures for and test interrelations between salesperson improvisation and constructs in its nomological net.

This chapter presents a general overview of the study. It introduces the study reported in this thesis and sets the context for subsequent discussions. By highlighting gaps in two research streams – sales management and organizational improvisation – that motivate the study, the chapter sets the pace for more in-depth discussions in the remainder of the thesis. It also presents the study objectives, research questions and key contributions in addition to how the chapters in the thesis are organised.

## 1.2 Research background

Competitive, fast-paced and unpredictable market conditions coupled with rising customer power are forcing firms to rethink their selling approaches (Auh, Spyropoulou, Menguc & Uslu, 2014; Wotruba, 1996). With competitive surprises, evolving customer needs, and an ever increasing risk of customer switching, firms have no alternative than to pursue market responsiveness (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). To achieve this, marketing scholarship suggests their need to develop the capability to sense markets, satisfy evolving customer needs and address competitive moves (Helm & Gritsch, 2014). Given their proximity to markets, salespersons are critical to the firm's ability to engage with the market in this regard (Hughes, Le Bon, & Rapp, 2013; Lambert, Marmorstein, & Sharma, 1990). They are a good source of market intelligence, the sharing of which enables firms to develop responsiveness strategy (Menguc, Auh & Kim, 2011).

Over and above this salespersons also remain, often, the best placed to implement market responsive actions. Customers define satisfaction with response time (Tom & Lucey, 1997) meaning that sales representatives cannot always afford to wait for market intelligence to be converted into strategy. Where customer needs are urgent, salespersons must take timely action to solve problems. Critically too, the heterogeneous nature of customer needs (Van Dolen, Lemmink, De Ruyter & DeJong, 2002), means that often the demands placed on salespersons are unexpected and "vaguely structured" (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004, p. 806). This requires salespersons to think and act on their feet to solve customer problems. As such, the nature of contemporary selling demands that salespersons develop improvisatory skills to resolve customer problems when it matters most.

While this highlights the urgent and uncertainty-laden conditions under which salespersons work, extant sales scholarship appears silent on their behaviours in response to such conditions. Admittedly, there is increased interest in salesperson emergent behaviours (Bonney & Williams, 2009; Lassk & Shepherd, 2013; Porter, Wiener, & Frankwick, 2003; Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). However, traditional notions of effective selling as a sequential seven-step process (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005; Weitz, 1978) denies us of clear insights on salesperson responses to so-called unexpected and urgent situations.

If, as argued by Chonko, Jones, Roberts, and Dubinsky (2002), contextual responsiveness is key to effective selling, then unexpected and urgent situations may require skills beyond the call to plan sales strategies. In that sense, sales success may not always lie with the extent of sales planning. Rather, effective selling in the contemporary era may be predicated on the salesperson's ability to think and act in the moment or to improvise. With this in mind, the fundamental question asked by this study is: *to what extent is salespersons' improvised responses in unexpected and urgent situations related to sales performance?*

**1.3 Gaps in the literature**

Previous scholars have asked similar questions about salespersons' contextual behaviours (e.g., Brown & Peterson, 1994; Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2003; Jaramillo & Mulki, 2008; Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). One construct, in particular, has come close to answering the above question: adaptive selling behaviour (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). However, this construct does not adequately account for unexpected and urgent sales situations. In improvisation, the salesperson is confined by the surprise and urgency in a situation to not only produce unplanned solutions, but

to act on them in the nick of time. In practitioner interviews, an informant (pharmaceutical salesperson) recounts a scenario where during an otherwise routine sales call, a customer unexpectedly demands a discount on a non-discount product, threatening to pull the account in its absence. Unprepared for this but needing to close the sale, he improvises by offering the customer a stock of nearly expired products in place of the discount. The customer gets to sell these off quickly to make the gains that would have accrued from discounts. The customer was happy with this arrangement and closed the sale.

In contrast, adaptive selling describes variations is sales presentations and behaviours based on customer characteristics (Chakrabarty, Widing & Brown, 2014; Chen & Jaramillo, 2014; Spiro & Weitz, 1990). To practice adaptive selling is for the salesperson to recognise that customers are unique for which reason a one-size-fits-all selling approach is sub-optimal. Beyond this recognition, salespersons must then factor in customer nuances in their dealings with respective customers (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). For instance, salespersons may profile buyers as either task-oriented or self-oriented and proceed to use different persuasion tactics in interactions with them. For task-oriented buyers, salespersons may adapt by emphasizing information exchange and recommendations during client meetings. On the other hand, they would employ ingratiation and promises during interactions with self-oriented buyers (McFarland et al., 2006).

As such, to be effective, adaptive selling requires salespersons to have a close knowledge of customers (through intelligence gathering) (Spiro & Weitz, 1990) suggesting a planning orientation. While adaptive behaviour is not strictly a planned behaviour, some preparation is inherently required for its effective application

(Moorman & Miner, 1998a). Where conditions in the sales situation are unexpected and, therefore, could not have been prepared for, (e.g. with previously held intelligence), a different behavioural mechanism other than adaptive selling may be required. Critically, where such conditions are also urgent, requiring immediate action, relevant behaviours must of necessity not only account for the newness of the situation, but also be timely. While adaptive selling enables behaviour variations in sales situations, it is not necessarily targeted at these conditions, making it inadequate in unexpected and urgent situations.

Other salesperson emergent behaviour constructs have also been identified as the discussion in section 2.3.3 of Chapter 2 shows. However, none of these directly addresses the combined implications of the urgency and unpredictability conditions frequently present in sales situations. These constructs either require some planning (precluding those unexpected situations requiring in-the-moment solutions) or are restricted to solution ideation to the neglect of the temporal demands in the situation. As such, theory and empirical evidence are lacking on how best salespersons must respond to urgent situations for which there is no clear strategy. This gap has led Singh and Koshy (2010) to call for selling models that fit specific sales situations to the specific skills that explain performance in them.

To shed light on the issue, this study introduces the notion of salesperson improvisation defined as salesperson behaviour (in sales situations) that is not 'pre-scripted' but rather conceived and implemented extemporaneously. It argues that in unexpected and urgent situations, salespersons often have little option than to think and act on their feet to ensure they do not lose out on a sale. Responding to Singh and Koshy's (2010) call for situation-specific constructs, the study taps into unexpected

and urgent sales situations and investigates how improvisatory responses in them are linked to sales success.

Given the silence, in the literature, on improvisatory behaviours among salespersons, it is not surprising that its drivers and boundary conditions remain unexplored. This is a critical omission. Given the rise into prominence of situational responsiveness as criteria for selling success (Hughes et al, 2013; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004), failing to address this signals a scholarship–practice gap. For, if scholars are to proffer insights on the conditions under which improvisatory behaviour is rewarded, we need theory and empirical evidence on its antecedents and boundaries. In that regard, the study investigates three antecedents and three boundary conditions to the improvisation-performance relationship.

Drawing from extant theory on salesperson emergent behaviours, the study identifies factors located at both the individual and firm levels which drive improvisational responses and condition their effectiveness. Extant scholarship suggests that salesperson emergent behaviours and their outcomes are often a function of factors located at these two levels (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). Specifically, the literature highlights self-efficacy, autonomy and experience as critical preconditions to emergent behaviours of salespersons (Jaramillo & Mulki, 2008; Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan, & Roberts, 2007; Wang & Netemeyer, 2002). Extant scholarship also suggests that performance pressures, resources and extent of individuals' disposition towards goal attainment (agency) (Bonney & Williams, 2009; Bandura 1982; 2006) are necessary boundary conditions shaping the effectiveness of emergent behaviours.

Accordingly, the study investigates the extent to which salesperson experience, autonomy and self-efficacy are implicated in the incidence of improvised responses (creativity and spontaneity). From the descriptive decision theory, the study argues that at the critical point where salespersons are called to improvise, it is the extent of their decision freedom, efficacy and experience (scope of generalised knowledge) that determine their responses (Bell, Raiffa & Tversky, 1988; Burke & Miller, 1999). Further, the study examines the possibility that resources, performance pressures and dispositional tendency towards situational inflexibility condition the effectiveness of improvisational behaviours (Burke & Miller, 1999; Schwienhorst, 2009).

Another gap identified in the literature lies at the nexus where planned selling meets unplanned descriptive approaches. Traditional notions of effective selling present a seven-step sequential process comprising (1) prospecting, (2) pre-approach, (3) approach, (4) presentation, (5) handling objections, (6) closing, and (7) follow-up. However, as it is increasingly clear, for non-routine sales situations different behaviours are required (Reid, Pullins & Plank, 2002). Accordingly, recent scholarship is focusing on new models of non-routine and unplanned selling behaviours such as solution selling and customised selling (Bonney & Williams, 2009). As Moncrief and Marshall (2005) suggest, the shift from a selling orientation to one of customer/relationship orientation has led to newly evolved non-sequential selling processes.

In the wake of this evolution, sales scholarship requires new theoretical lenses with which to explain unplanned behaviour variations targeted at situational relevance. A promising theory, in this regard, is the decision-making theory which, via normative and descriptive routes, explains the continuum of features that characterise individual

decision and action (Bell, Raiffa, & Tversky, 1988; Kunreuther et al., 2002). With decision-making theory it becomes possible for sales scholars to juxtapose planned versus emergent selling approaches. This enables a deeper understanding of how salespersons' descriptive and context-driven behaviours are derived and shaped.

The normative decision route is premised on the basic fallibility of decision makers. As such, it advocates the accrual and analysis of patterns to routinize decisions and make them less error-prone (Howard, 1988). Relative to salesperson behaviours, normative decision theory is reflected in planned selling approaches. Such approaches aim to generate options (strategies) around which salespersons may vary their behaviours in customer interactions. As such, it may be argued that the process theory orientation of the extant sales literature shows a bias towards normative analysis.

Normative decision-based theories such as goal theory, theory of planned behaviour, expectancy theory and attribution theory successfully explain salespersons' planned behaviours (Brown, Cron & Slocum Jr, 1997). However, in spite of their insight, such theories do not necessarily enable explanations of the foundations of salespersons' behaviour variations in response to contextual demands. To explain such behaviours, sales scholarship needs to advance to unexplored theoretical logics that account for the nuances in sales situations (Singh & Koshy, 2010). This remains to be done.

This study draws on the alternative logic of decision-based behaviour – the descriptive decision-making theory – to articulate linkages between the context-driven (salesperson improvisation) behaviour to sales performance. Descriptive decision theorists argue that while norms and plans have their utility, context should not be ignored (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981). This is because, too often, organisational

members face harsh situational realities that require them to deviate from established norms of behaviour (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). To be responsive to such situational demands for deviation, individuals must rely on stored knowledge frames, heuristics and situational cues to generate satisficing responses.

From the descriptive decision-making logic, salespersons facing unexpected and urgent situations may be viewed as bounded in their rationality by their lack of clarity in such situations. Their improvisatory responses, therefore, draw from existing generalised knowledge, and instinctive judgements about context cues and relevant behaviours. In other words, under such conditions, success may lie in the ability to make in-the-moment assessments of situations and to draw on heuristics and instinct to generate context-relevant solutions. As such, under unexpected and urgent conditions where responses are surrounded by uncertainty, the descriptive logic becomes a more suitable theoretical lens.

While a very promising avenue for researching the recent turn towards more context-based selling approaches, the promise of descriptive decision-making in the sales context remains untapped. Accordingly, this study employs this theory to show how improvisation encapsulates a descriptive decision-based approach to selling by which salespersons try to be responsive to the demands of unexpected and urgent situations. In doing so, the study draws attention to the descriptive decision-making theory as a suitable theoretical lens for explaining salespersons' behaviour variations in response to context demands.

In conceptualizing the salesperson improvisation construct, the study borrows from existing theory in the broader organizational improvisation literature. However,

additional gaps in this body of knowledge also inform the present study. Organizational improvisation literature displays a macro level analysis bias (i.e. firm {Hmieleski & Corbett, 2008; Kyriakopoulos, 2011, 2015}; team {Akgün & Lynn, 2002; Vera & Crossan, 2005} and even venture levels {Nemkova, Souchon, & Hughes, 2012; Nemkova, Souchon, Hughes, & Micevski, 2015}). Particularly within the field of marketing, few studies examine individual level improvisation (Daly, Grove, Dorsch, & Fisk, 2009; Hmielski & Corbett, 2006). While the macro level analysis cannot be faulted in its contributions, understanding individual level improvisation presents more opportunity for understanding the construct. To the extent that team, venture or firm level improvisation is, itself, an accumulation of individual level improvisations, theorizing the construct at the individual level should bring more clarity to how its foundations are formed. Importantly, such effort should also enable nuanced insights for managing the construct at the group levels. For instance, by understanding the drivers, consequences and boundaries of individual level improvisation, managers should be better placed to make decisions about whether and how to engender it among individual team and organisational members.

Importantly, the organizational improvisation literature is fraught with disagreements about the construct's value. Negative, positive and insignificant effects have all been reported (see Hmieleski & Corbett, 2008; Kyriakopoulos, 2011; Samra, Lynn, & Reilly, 2008). This has led leading improvisation scholars to conclude that it is neither good nor bad (Moorman & Miner, 1998a; Vera & Crossan, 2005). Clearly, there is scope for clarifying these ambiguities in the literature.

This study argues that the ambivalence surrounding improvisation may be due to differential effects of its underlying dimensions. While scholars agree that

improvisation is multifaceted (Hmielski & Corbett, 2006; Nemkova et al., 2012; Vera & Crossan, 2005), they have generally shied away from deconstructing it into its sub-elements. This undermines the opportunity to understand how its effects are shaped. As such, this study operationalises salesperson improvisation as consisting of two dimensions (salesperson creativity and salesperson spontaneity). It then uses this dis-aggregate measure to decipher the unique contributions of each individual dimension (Nemkova et al., 2015), bringing some clarity to the literature.

For both the sales and improvisation literatures, evidence from emerging economy contexts such as Africa remains, at best, very limited (Panagopoulos et al., 2011). While several constructs have emerged that explain salesperson behaviours in developed economies, there is a dearth of scholarship on their ecological validity relative to emerging markets (Panagopoulos et al., 2011).

The improvisation literature displays a similar lack of emerging market evidence. If, as suggested by George et al (2016, p. 377), Africa is "beginning to capture the imagination of entrepreneurs, corporate executives, and scholars", then it presents exciting context for research. According to George et al (2016), researching the African context presents rare opportunity to bring new perspectives to existing management theories and also to test their relevance beyond developed contexts. Accordingly, the study tests the proposed conceptual model on a sample of industrial salespersons in an emerging African economy, Ghana.

From the forgoing, it is suggested that this study is situated at the intersection of three broad research streams—sales management, organizational improvisation and psychology. To understand salesperson emergent behaviours, the study draws from

extant sales scholarship. However, to theorise the nature of such behaviours under conditions of exigency and surprise, the study draws from the improvisation literature. This enables an understanding of the conjoint thinking and action processes that characterise salespersons' responses in such situations. Lastly, it draws from psychology literature on decision-making. Through the specific lens of descriptive decision-making theory, the study espouses an alternative explanation of emergent selling behaviours away from the traditional step-by-step approaches. Figure 1 depicts the positioning of the study within the three research streams.

**Figure 1 Research positioning**



**1.4 Research questions, objectives and contributions**

From the discussions above, this study is guided by a number of key research questions:

- What is the nature of salesperson improvisation and how can it be conceptualised?
- To what extent is salesperson improvisation related to sales performance

- Are the individual dimensions of salesperson improvisation differentially related to sales performance?

- Which factors drive the incidence of salesperson improvisation?

- What factors conditions the boundaries of salesperson improvisation?

In seeking answers to these questions, the study aims to contribute to existing sales and improvisation scholarship with insights on (1) how salespersons improvise; (2) its effects and any differential implications of its underlying dimensions; as well as (3) its drivers and boundaries. By so doing, the study hopes to proffer suggestions to researchers, practitioners and managers on how salespersons may effectively respond to exigency and surprise without sacrificing sales outputs.

To elaborate, this study primarily seeks answers to the question as to how salespersons respond to situations requiring them to improvise responses. Arguing that improvisation is a critical salesperson behaviour that is yet to be accounted for, the study draws from extant improvisation conceptualization to understand its characteristics. Sales scholarship, recognising the increasingly critical role of selling context, has proved very productive in developing theories on salesperson' emergent behaviours. Notably, the constructs of adaptive selling (Spiro & Weitz, 1990), creative performance (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004) among others have been instrumental in leading the way. However, as Singh and Koshy (2010) conclude from their literature review, contemporary selling demands scholars to focus on specific sales situation types to identify relevant contextual skills that enable customer centric solutions.

Thus, building on these works, this study's first contribution lies in its conceptualization of the salesperson improvisation construct as an alternative selling

approach suitable to unexpected and urgent sales situations. Unlike previous ones, this study accounts for the particular context of unexpected and urgent sales situations, enabling an understanding of salesperson behaviours where planned response options are strictly off the table. This breaks new ground by extending extant knowledge into new domains relative to the frequently unpredictable and urgent situations industrial salespersons face. By conceptualising the salesperson improvisation construct, too, the study lays the foundation not only for future scholarly engagement with it but also opportunity for scholarly insights into leveraging it.

Another major contribution to sales scholarship lies in the seven-item measure developed for assessing the salesperson improvisation construct. Being the first to apply the construct to the sales domain, the study develops a measure of salesperson improvisation as a multi-dimensional construct comprising independent measures of salesperson creativity and spontaneity. This should serve future scholars well in their effort to investigate improvisational behaviours among salespersons.

Beyond these contributions, however, lies the bigger issue of whether improvisation has any value for salespersons and sales organizations. To shed light on this, the study tests a model of salesperson improvisation's relationships with constructs in its nomological net. The study examines the relationships between salesperson improvisation dimensions and sales performance. It further investigates links between the dimensions and their proposed drivers (experience, autonomy and self-efficacy) on one hand, and proposed boundary conditions (resource availability, pressure to perform and individual agency) on the other. The resulting evidence presents rare insights on a behaviour otherwise unexamined in the sales literature. This extends the literature by highlighting characteristics of the sales situation as defining features of

salesperson behaviours. Importantly, doing so enables the study to how sales organizations may manipulate the construct and leverage its benefits.

Another novel contribution of the study lies in its application of descriptive decision-making theory in explaining salesperson's emergent behaviours. To the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first to apply the theoretic logic of descriptive decision-making to the sales domain. In a discipline that has historically been dominated by a planned behaviour bias (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005), planning-oriented theories have proved useful in explaining effective selling (Brown et al., 1997). However, the recent turn towards non-planned selling behaviours targeting customer responsiveness (Tom & Lucey, 1997; Reid et al., 2002) means that new explanatory mechanisms are needed. Descriptive decision-making theory promises fresh insights and opportunities for updating the literature. The study's use of this theoretical lens, therefore, extends sales scholarship into new frontiers where alternative and more contemporary approaches to selling become conceivable and better understood.

The study also makes contributions to the broader organisational improvisation literature. Existing evidence on the construct's value remain inconsistent as it has been found to be both positive and negative (see Hmieleski & Corbett, 2008; Kyriakopoulos, 2011; Samra, Lynn, & Reilly, 2008). This has prompted key improvisation scholars to suggest that the construct presents a double-edged sword effect such that it is neither good nor bad (Moorman & Miner, 1998a; Vera & Crossan, 2004). To clarify these equivocal findings, the study makes a unique contribution to the improvisation literature by adopting a dis-aggregate analytical strategy where the unique implications of the individual dimensions are examined. It follows a similar strategy adopted by Nemkova et al. (2015) who explored individual improvisation

dimensions relative to their implications for export performance. By doing so, this study brings clarity to the evidence on the construct's value.

By showing the differential implications of the individual dimensions, the study sheds lights on why some existing evidence points in the negative direction while others are positive. This is an important addition to the improvisation literature. Not only does this approach help clarify the reasons for the contrasting evidence on the construct's value, it also enables fine-gained insights on how its benefits may be realised and its dark sides attenuated. Importantly too, the approach represents a viable methodological contribution as it shows the way to future improvisation scholars who seek a more nuanced understanding of the construct.

Last but not least, this study extends the frontiers of both sales and improvisation literatures to a context previously unexamined – the emerging African economy context. By testing the conceptual model on Ghana-based salespersons, the study brings fresh perspectives to both literatures (George et al., 2016). Particularly, in the case of the improvisation scholarship, this study sheds light on the applicability of the construct beyond the developed economy markets where it has, hitherto, been studied.

## 1.5 Thesis outline

The issues raised in the forgoing sections are attended to in greater detail in other chapters of this thesis. Altogether, there are six chapters to this thesis, the first of which is this introductory chapter which sets the tone for the rest of the discussions. A full outline of the chapters is provided in the table below.

**Table 1 Outline of thesis chapters**

| Chapter | Thematic focus |
|---|---|
| Chapter 1 | Introduction to the research, its objectives, key questions and contributions |

| Chapter 2 | Review and synthesis of sales and improvisation literatures |
| Chapter 3 | Theoretical underpinnings, conceptual model and hypotheses arguments |
| Chapter 4 | Philosophical foundations and methodological processes followed |
| Chapter 5 | Data analysis and results |
| Chapter 6 | Discussion of results, conclusions, implications and study limitations |

**1.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented a broad outline of the issues motivating the study reported in this thesis. Beginning with a background on the exigency and surprise-laden context of contemporary selling, the chapter discussed attempts in the literature to address. It also highlighted gaps in two bodies of literature – sales management and organisational improvisation – and how the present study addresses them.

# CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter takes an overview of the relevant literature in charting a course for the current study. Primarily, the chapter discusses extant literature pertaining to predictors of salesperson performance. It also attempts a general review of the improvisation construct as applied within the marketing scholarship. In so doing, the chapter builds a case for gaps in both the sales management and organizational improvisation literatures to establish the merit of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### 2.2 Introduction

For both scholars and managers, predicting salesperson performance is critical. This is because salespersons, by virtue of their boundary roles, occupy a critical position that has direct implications for firms' market responsiveness (Hughes, Le Bon, & Rapp, 2013). As Vinchur et al. (1998) argue, improvements in productivity and product quality are pointless unless the product or service can be placed in the hands of consumers. As the bridge between customers and the firm, the salesperson stands at the very core of this transfer.

For decades, scholars have attempted to understand the factors that drive salesperson performance. It is not surprising, therefore, the plethora of constructs that have emerged in the literature. While it is impossible to mention all these constructs, general trends appear perceivable. Accordingly, the following discussion highlights three main thematic domains in the sales literature. Specifically, it covers what we

know about salesperson behaviours relative to their individuality, roles as organizational members and existence at the firm boundary.

## 2.3 Conceptual underpinnings of sales scholarship

### 2.3.1 The personality and individual characteristics stream

A common theme in sales scholarship is the role of personality differences, individual orientations and motivations. Here, scholars seek to understand the role of stable traits in driving salesperson performance. This stream of research accordingly applies the five-factor personality model (Neurotism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience) to demonstrate that salespersons have inherent differences that shape their behavioural outcomes.

Examples include Barrick, Mount, and Strauss' (1993) study which examines conscientiousness. Brown, Cron, and Slocum's (1998) and Harris, Mowen, and Brown's (2005) studies have also looked at competitive traits. There is also Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese, and Thoresen's (2004) examination of how personality factors account for performance trajectories and systematic growth. Finally, Harris et al. (2005) look at the relationship between personality factors and goal setting/performance levels. Early research also examined the roles of cognitive ability and motivations as performance drivers among salespersons (Miner, 1962).

Generally, this stream of research has achieved some convergence in findings. Meta-analytic evidence (Judge & Ilies, 2002; Vinchur et al., 1998) suggests that personality factors do drive salesperson performance. While a very established research area, the influence of enduring traits on selling approaches continues to enjoy scholarly attention. More recent works examine how these factors work in concert with less

trait-like ones. For instance, Shannahan, Bush, and Shannahan (2013) examined the interrelationships between salespersons' trait competitiveness, their coachability and sales manager leadership style in predicting performance.

The attention to enduring individual traits while useful, may be limited in its possibilities. Churchill, Ford and Hartley (1985) argued early on that sales scholarship needs to identify influenceable factors that drive performance. They argue that the sales role being what it is, it is impractical to dwell on stable factors to the disregard of those that could be manipulated. Their meta-analytic review of the early sales literature unearthed three other groups of non-trait factors - role perceptions, individual skills and organizational/environmental factors.

### 2.3.2 The salesperson as an organizational member

It is not surprising, therefore, that sales literature devotes attention to salespersons' roles as organizational members. In this inquiry, scholars examine how salespersons characterise their roles within firms and how such definitions affect their output. Key considerations include salespersons' socialization processes with a view to understanding how they develop their identities within firms. Examples of such studies include Dubinsky et al's (1986) examination of the various stages involved in sales force socialization. Menguc, Han and Auh (2007) have also examined the implications of a collectivist culture, to salespeople's socialization.

Importantly, this stream of research also engages the characteristics of the sales role and their implications for salespersons' role definitions. Key constructs identified in this line of inquiry include role ambiguity, role clarity, and role conflict (Boles, Wood, & Johnson, 2003; Rhoads, Singh, & Goodell, 1994; Singh, 1993). Others are role

stress, role overload and salesperson burnout (Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Jones et al., 2007; Lewin & Sager, 2007; Singh, 1998). Considerable attention has also gone to capability factors such as salespersons' self-efficacy in dealing with the job demands (Dixon & Schertzer, 2005; Krishnan, Netemeyer, & Boles, 2002; Mulki, Lassk, & Jaramillo, 2008; Wang & Netemeyer, 2002).

Nested within this stream of scholarly work is a sub-group of studies that examine salespersons as citizens of the firm. Here, sales scholars explore how salespersons define themselves, give to and find relevance within firms. Key constructs include organizational citizenship behaviour (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1993; Marshall, Moncrief, Lassk, & David Shepherd, 2012; Piercy, Cravens, Lane, & Vorhies, 2006), organizational commitment (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Marshall, 2005; Leong, Randall, & Cote, 1994; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearne, 1998), organizational spontaneity (George & Brief, 1992; George & Jones, 1997) and pro-social behaviour (Agnihotri, Krush & Singh, 2012).

Another construct that examines how salespersons contribute to their organizations is sales effort. Defined as the duration of time spent on a given sales task and the energy expended therein (Brown & Peterson, 1994), effort encapsulates how hard salespersons work (Krishnan et al., 2002). In the plethora of tasks assigned to salespersons, they constantly must decide what to concentrate on (Hughes, 2013) and how hard to work on it. There is compelling evidence suggesting the value of salesperson effort in driving performance (Hughes, 2013; Jaramillo & Muilki, 2008; Krishnan et al., 2002; Brown & Peterson, 1994).

Another sub-stream of research looks at salespersons' roles as organizational members relative to how firms manage relationships with them. This literature explores how firms set boundaries for and manage relationships with salespersons. Here, researchers examine sales management control systems (Challagalla & Shervani, 1996; Cravens, Lassk, Low, Marshall, & Moncrief, 2004; Robertson & Anderson, 1993) and compensation systems (Basu, Lal, Srinivasan, & Staelin, 1985; Raju & Srinivasan, 1996; Straughan & Lynn, 2002).

In close relation, this scholarship also engages intra-organizational exchanges with salespersons. Specific topics include salespersons interactions and exchanges with peers and supervisors (Amyx & Alford, 2005; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Rich, 2001; Mathieu, Ahearne, & Taylor, 2007; Yilmaz & Hunt, 2001). Attention also goes to the knowledge sharing behaviours of salespersons within firms (Auh & Menguc, 2013; Menguc et al., 2011).

Based on the premise of salespersons' access to key intelligence, such studies explore how the organizational environment enable and encourage their knowledge sharing. A sub-stream of this literature also devotes attention to the incidence of conflict among sales team members. Studies exploring this topic include Auh et al (2014), and Dixon, Gassenheimer and Barr (2002).

To understand this set of variables, scholars use person-organization fit theories suggesting that salesperson behaviours are a joint function of the compatibility between their characteristics and the firm environment (see Vilela, González & Ferrín, 2008; Netemeyer et al., 1997). Leader-member exchange theory which argues that the

relationship between salespersons and their leaders shapes performance is also common (see Swift & Campbell, 1995; Lagace, 1990).

### 2.3.3 The salesperson at the organizational boundary

Relative to salespersons' boundary roles, a primary concern is how firms may be market oriented using salespersons as conduits. A direct offshoot of the emphasis on relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), researchers examine salespersons' relationship management activities with customers. According to Palmatier, Dant and Grewal (2007), salespersons' attention to customer relationships enhances customer trust and commitment which in turn leads to sales growth.

Empirical evidence on the direct effects of the relationship management construct for firm performance is inconclusive (Palmatier et al., 2007). However, its benefit for salespersons appears to be consistent. For instance, Palmatier et al (2007) found that in the mix of customer loyalties that may develop out of relationship marketing, only salesperson-owned loyalty directly affects firms' financial performance.

Similarly, Frankwick, Porter and Crosby (2001) show that the quality of the salesperson's relationship with customers contributes to customer retention rates and expanded share of wallet. Reynolds and Beatty (1999) also found positive implications for customer satisfaction, customer spend and ambassadorial behaviours. Lastly, a meta-analytic framework by Palmatier et al (2007) suggests that the real benefits of relationship marketing lie at the nexus where such relationships are nurtured by an identified member of the selling firm (the salesperson).

The salesperson boundary role has also been the subject of interest for its implications for the marketing concept. In articulating the market orientation construct, Kohli and Jaworski (1990) emphasized market responsiveness as key to unlocking competitive advantage. In particular, they delineate the criticality of market intelligence generation, dissemination and application to responsive marketing behaviours.

Similarly, Slater and Narver (1994) who propose an alternative view of the market orientation construct highlight its customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination processes. Irrespective of the view of market orientation held, at the core is the emphasis on close relations with the market.

How salespersons fit into this realization of the marketing concept is, therefore, of keen interest. Issues examined include the spill-over effect of firm's market orientation on salespersons. For instance, Siguaw, Brown, and Widing (1994) and Langerak (2001) explore whether firms' stance on market orientation influences salespersons' own market orientation.

In close relation to this is research juxtaposing salespersons' drive towards short term sales gains versus their customer orientation. The Saxe and Weitz (1982) conceptualization of the selling orientation, customer orientation (SOCO) scale was a step in this direction. Their empirical testing of the construct found that there are real benefits to be gained when salespersons adopt the customer's view.

Similarly, Boles, Babin, Brashear, and Brooks (2001) examined the interplay between firm customer orientation, salesperson SOCO and sales performance. They found that

salesperson customer orientation which derives from firm customer orientation is related to their performance while their selling orientation is not.

The scholarly attention to the salesperson–firm market orientation nexus has also focused on their roles as intelligence harbingers. As mentioned, both the Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Slater and Narver (1994) conceptualizations of the marketing concept emphasize closeness to the market. For this to be realizable, firms need their own allies in the market to study and identify opportunities in it. As the firm's eyes and ears on the market, salespersons intelligence activities are critical.

Key contributions in this area include Festervand, Grove and Reidenbach's (1988) early analysis of the sales force as an integral element of the firm's marketing intelligence system. They proposed a model of salesperson intelligence activities as driven by organizational climate, training, role clarity and job description. In this model, the sales manager is conceived of as a central processing unit, mobilizing and assessing intelligence from salespersons to be passed on to the higher echelons. Le Bon and Merunka (2006) also report salesperson's desire for upwards mobility as key to their intelligence activities.

Following these, Rapp, Agnihotri and Baker (2011) have formalised such activities in their salesperson competitive intelligence construct. Several other studies examine how salespersons' intelligence activities affect various outcomes including share of customer wallet and profit margins (Hughes et al., 2013) and individual performance (Rapp, Agnihotri, & Baker, 2014).

Of importance to this study are those studies exploring salespersons' emergent behaviours towards customer responsiveness. Spiro and Weitz (1990) introduced the adaptive selling behaviour construct to articulate how salespersons actualize their sensitivity to customers' needs as they move from one to the other. Arguably, the most popular construct in the sales literature, adaptive selling behaviour demonstrates stability in its implications for key outcomes.

These include sales performance (Franke & Park, 2006; Spiro & Weitz, 1990), customer satisfaction (Román & Iacobucci, 2010), customer retention (Park & Halloway, 2003) and job satisfaction (Park & Deitz,2006). The construct has also been examined relative to demographic factors (Levy & Sharma, 1994), learning orientations (Park & Halloway, 2003) and attitudinal factors such as confidence (Roman & Iacobucci, 2010) among others. Perhaps, one of the main achievements of the construct, is the attention it has generated with regards to salespersons' contextual behaviours at the organisational boundary. Recognizing that salesperson behaviours ought to vary as a function of customer and situation characteristics Spiro and Weitz (1990) argued that the ability to do this is an opportunity not to be missed.

Wang and Netemeyer (2004) have also explored the creative aspects of salespersons' situational behaviours and introduced the salesperson creative performance construct. On the basis of the changing nature of the sales job, they argued that an ability to creatively generate solutions is a critical ingredient for sales success. Building on this, Coelho, Augusto, and Lages (2011) tested the effects of context on frontline employees' creative responses. Their evidence shows that situation complexity and customer relationship shape salespersons' creative responses.

Agnihotri et al (2013) confirm the value of creativity in sales situations. They tested links from salesperson emotional intelligence and manager feedback to creativity and then to performance. Their results corroborate existing evidence that creativity has significant positive implications for salesperson performance.

Bonney and Williams (2009) have also discussed salespersons' need for situational attentiveness as a means to discover sales opportunities. Highlighting the importance of attention to context cues, their study also establishes such attention as key to customer responsiveness. Being conceptual, however, this study provided no empirical evidence on the real value of attentiveness in sales situations.

However, Homburg, Wieseke, and Bornemann (2009), through the lens of their Customer Need Knowledge construct, provide evidence in this regard. They tested and found support for a model predicting that accurate identification of customers' needs is critical to the achievement of context-specific goals. Similarly, Ramsey and Sohi (1997) provide evidence that when customers perceive salesperson to listen, it increases their trust in and satisfaction with the salesperson. In turn, these increase the possibility for future business. More evidence on this comes from Pryor, Malshe and Paradise (2013) who found that salesperson listening boosts customer perception of the former's concern for them and contributes to longer term relationships.

Closely related to the situational attentiveness literature is the rising importance of the emotional intelligence construct. Defined as the ability to monitor one's emotions and those of others for use as decision guides, emotional intelligence enables salespersons to connect better with customers (Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2003). This line of thinking is supported by the works of Rojell, Pettijohn and Parker (2006), Aggarwal,

Castleberry, Ridnour and Shepherd (2005) and Lassk and Shepherd (2013). According to Lassk and Shepherd (2013, p. 27), "a salesperson can use emotion to get his or her client excited about a product… or to respond appropriately when a client exhibits confusion about a complex product".

More recently, Chen and Jaramillo (2014) examined the interplay between emotional intelligence, adaptive selling and customer loyalty. Their evidence shows that the use of emotional intelligence as a guide to behaviour adaptation increases salesperson-owned customer loyalty. Thus it appears that by breaking through emotional boundaries, salespersons are better placed to connect with customers on a level that wins them customer support.

From the foregoing, it is clear that sales scholars have unearthed a wide range of constructs to explain variations in salesperson performance. Particularly in the research focusing on the boundary role, the factors discovered are insightful in the breadth of issues covered and their relevance for the evolving sales role. Importantly, these studies also highlight the critical role of the sales situation and context cues in shaping salesperson behaviours.

However, few of these studies have openly isolated nuances in specific sales situation types to understand their implications for salesperson behaviours and their outcomes. These include Reid et al (2002) who classify sales situations into three types using the purchase task as main criterion. They identify new task, modified rebuy and straight rebuy sales situation types and examine salespersons' adaptive communication behaviours in them. Their study shows that the characteristics of the sales situation type and context cues therein do have implications for salespersons' (communication)

behaviours and outcomes. In a similar exercise, Porter et al (2003) investigated how the sales situation moderates the relationship between selling strategy and sales performance. They found that adaptive selling worked in concert with the sales situation in predicting sales performance. Specifically, their evidence shows that adaptive selling behaviours are best applied in modified rebuy and new buy situation as opposed to routine sales situations.

McFarland, Challagalla and Shervani (2006) classified sales situations according to the characteristics of the buyer with whom the salesperson must engage to close the sale. They examined the use of different influence tactics depending on the buyer types. According to them, in any given sales situation, buyers may be task, self or interaction oriented, a condition that has implications for specific behavioural responses. For instance, where customers are task oriented, suitable influence tactics emphasize recommendations and information exchange. On the other hand, self-oriented customers are better served with promises and ingratiation while inspirational appeals and ingratiation work better when customers are interaction-oriented.

Clearly, some evidence exist to show that factors within sales situations elicit specific behavioural responses. That being the case, it becomes imperative for sales scholars to profile different sales situations types to be able to propose behaviours suited to them (Koshy & Singh, 2010). From the preceding evidence, it is apparent that scholars are beginning to attend to this quest. However, the evidence also shows that the emphasis has, so far, been on the purchase task and customer characteristics as descriptors of sales situation types. This completely ignores a particular sales situation type which has gained prominence in recent articulations of the exigent and uncertainty-laden characteristics of personal selling – unexpected and urgent sales situations.

As previously argued, the face of the sales situation is changing to assume more pressure. Two decades ago, Anderson (1996, p. 17) suggested that "evolutionary and revolutionary forces are relentlessly heading our way that will irrevocably change the way that salespeople and sales managers understand, prepare for, and accomplish their jobs" (Anderson, 1996, p. 17). Recent scholarly articulations of the conditions under which salespersons work corroborate this assertion. According to Auh et al (2014), competition has rendered markets fast-paced and unpredictable forcing sales teams to change how they sell. Similarly, Hughes (2013, p. 7) argues that "salespeople are constantly faced with time allocation decisions" while Wang and Netemeyer (2004) argue that the contemporary sales situation is full of challenge and situational ambiguity.

To effectively account for success in this changing context, scholars require new behavioural constructs that tap the exigent context in which it takes place (Singh & Koshy, 2010). Thus, it would seem that scholarly articulations of what drives salesperson performance should account for this. Importantly, the preceding discussion highlights the merit for situational variations in behaviour (Table 2 presents a summary of research examining salespersons' emergent behaviours in sales situations). However, it is unclear what happens when such situations are unexpected (and therefore not catered for by strategy) and urgent (thus requiring urgent action). Theory and empirical evidence is lacking with regards to how salespersons respond in situations that require them to improvise. Such situations cannot simply be dealt with by varying sales presentations nor by being creative (as adaptive selling and creative performance suggest). As shown by Yeboah Banin et al (2016), such situations require salespersons to think and act on their feet.

As a first step to filling this gap, this study introduces salesperson improvisation as a contextual behaviour variable that might help explain salesperson behaviours under conditions of exigency and surprise. The following section presents a review of the literature on improvisation within firms as a precursor to a discussion of its application to this study in Chapter 3.

**Table 2 Empirical contributions on salesperson emergent behaviours in sales situations**

| Authors | Primary focus | Exigency/surprise approach to sales situation | Theoretical background | Key findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Harish Sujan, Weitz, and Sujan (1988)** | Presents a list of suggestions on how to drive adaptive selling behaviours in salesperson-customer interactions | Generic reference to sales situations | --- | Proposes the following as key to helping salespersons adapt in their interactions with customer: Customer categorization, Market intelligence usage, Training, Compensation systems |
| **Spiro and Weitz (1990)** | Develops a measure salesperson adaptive selling behaviour and tests its nomological relationships | Generic reference to sales situations | Self-monitoring theory Role differentiation theory | -Intrinsic motivation drives adaptive selling behavior -Adaptive selling behavior is related to self-rated performance -Adaptive selling behavior is not related to supervisor rated performance |
| **Levy and Sharma (1994)** | Examines how salespeople's demographic factors affect their adaptive selling behaviours | Generic reference to sales situations | --- | -Gender and education interact with age to predict adaptive selling behaviours - Increased age and tenure have an s-shaped relationship with the practice of adaptive selling. |
| **Brown and Peterson (1994)** | Investigates the effect of effort across job-related tasks (including customer sales situations) on sales performance and job satisfaction | Includes all sales job related situations… beyond actual sales situations with customers | Motivation theories | Salesperson effort invested in tacking job-related tasks increases their performance and job satisfaction |
| **Ramsey and Sohi (1997)** | Develops a scale salesperson listening and tests its implications for customer trust, satisfaction and anticipation of future interactions | Salesperson-customer interactions | Interpersonal needs theory | Perceived salesperson listening during interactions anticipation of future interaction. |

**Table 2 Empirical contributions on salesperson emergent behaviours in sales situations (continued)**

| Authors | Primary focus | Exigency/surprise approach to sales situation | Theoretical background | Key findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Reid et al. (2002)** | Examines salespersons adapt their communication behaviours with buyers as a function of sales situation type (new task, modified rebuy, straight rebuy). | Classifies the sales situation using the purchase task perspective | Communication perspective. | -Salespersons vary their information giving and seeking behaviours depending on the purchase situation<br>-Salespersons engage in formation use behaviours irrespective of the type of purchase situation<br>-Salespersons seek more information in complex sales situations but tend to give less |
| **Krishnan et al. (2002)** | Test a model proposing relationships between salesperson self-efficacy, Competitiveness, and effort in and performance. | Includes all sales job related situations… beyond actual sales situations with customers | --- | -Self-efficacy and competitiveness drive salesperson effort invested in job-related tasks<br>-Salesperson effort and self-efficacy drive sales performance |
| **Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka (2003)** | Qualitative study of the use of emotional intelligence by salespersons | Customer interactions | --- | -Emotional intelligence was found to manifest in salespeople's customer interactions in the form of: empathy, self-regulation, self-awareness and self-motivation.<br>-Generally, emotional regulation may be related to sales performance |
| **Park and Holloway ( 2003)** | Tests the relationship between adaptive selling behaviour, learning orientation, sales performance and job satisfaction | Generic reference to sales situations | --- | -Learning orientation drives adaptive selling behaviour<br>-Adaptive selling behaviour positively influences customer retention, new customer findings, sales volume, market share, profit generation, and job satisfaction. |

**Table 2 Empirical contributions on salesperson emergent behaviours in sales situations (continued)**

| Authors | Primary focus | Exigency/surprise approach to sales situation | Theoretical background | Key findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **McFarland (2003)** | Examines how salesperson's use of coercive sales tactics in sales situations affect their perception of role stress as well as their ability to influence buyer decisions | Generic reference to sales situations | Theory of goal directed emotion | -Use of coercive sales tactics (threats and promises) is associated with higher levels of felt stress. -Stress reduces the ability to influence customers |
| **Porter et al. (2003)** | Investigates how the selling situation encountered by a salesperson moderates the relationship between selling strategy and sales performance. | Classifies the sales situation using the purchase task perspective | Contingency perspective | The benefits of adaptive selling for performance outcomes are stronger in a modified rebuy and new buy situation |
| **Wang and Netemeyer (2004)** | Conceptualizes, and develops a scale for the salesperson creative performance construct, and presents propositions regarding its nomology | Includes all sales job related situations… beyond actual sales situations with customers | Social psychology theory | Proposes that salesperson creative performance is related to adaptive selling, work and learning effort, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, autonomy, customer demandingness and sales performance |
| **Giacobbe, Jackson Jr, Crosby, and Bridges (2006)** | Tests a model of adaptive selling behaviour and sales performance as conditioned by sales situation/adaptive conditions including: modified rebuy/new purchase buyer's perceived risk buyer complexity product/offering complexity Adaptability of offering | Generic adaptive sales conditions | Contingency logic | Adaptive selling is positively related to sales performance but this effect is stronger 'adaptive' conditions |

**Table 2 Empirical contributions on salesperson emergent behaviours in sales situations (continued)**

| Authors | Primary focus | Exigency/surprise approach to sales situation | Theoretical background | Key findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Rojell et al. (2006)** | Tests the relationship between emotional intelligence and sales force performance | Generic reference to customer interactions | Social Intelligence theory | Emotional intelligence in sales situations is related to sales performance. The individual dimensions of emotional intelligence (empathy, emotional self-control and external control) all predict sales performance |
| **McFarland et al. (2006)** | Examines the influence tactics that work with different buyer orientations in sales situations when salespersons attempt to sell adaptively | Customer postures that shape the sales situation | Attitude change theoretical logic | -Task-oriented customers are influenced by recommendations, information exchange but they cannot be influenced by promises and ingratiation. -Ingratiation and promises are effective for high self-oriented customers while threats reduce the ability to influence low self-oriented customers. -For interaction-oriented customers, inspirational appeals and ingratiation are effective |
| **Flaherty, Arnold, and Shane Hunt (2007)** | Investigates the extent to which variations in sales situations (transactional, relationship oriented or account management) sales situations condition the relationship between sales control systems and sales performance | Typology of sales situations with no reference to the temporality of exigency | Fit theory | The effect of sales control system on sales performance is contingent of sales situation type |

**Table 2 Empirical contributions on salesperson emergent behaviours in sales situations (continued)**

| Authors | Primary focus | Exigency/surprise approach to sales situation | Theoretical background | Key findings |
|---------|---------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| **Jaramillo and Mulki (2008)** | Investigates the drivers and consequences of salesperson effort | Not sales situation specific. Looks at effort across all aspects of the sales job | Path Goal theory | Salesperson effort across job related situations is positively related to job performance |
| **Bonney and Williams (2009)** | Introduces salesperson opportunity recognition as a key construct for increasing sales performance in solution selling contexts. | Customers' larger operating and business context | Entrepreneurship Cognitive selling | Propositions that SOR is driven by encouragement of creativity, autonomy, portfolio heterogeneity, customer demandingness and intrinsic rewards strengthened and in turn affects solution effectiveness/efficiency |
| **Homburg et al. (2009)** | Introduces and tests Customer need knowledge (CNK) (the extent to which frontline employees are able to accurately judge the needs of their customers). | Generic reference to customer interactions | Perceptual accuracy logic | Frontline employee's customer orientation and cognitive empathy predict CNK CNK is positively related to customer satisfaction and customer willingness to pay |
| **Román and Iacobucci (2010)** | Dyadic study of the attitudinal and behavioural aspects of adaptive selling | | | -The relationship between perception of firm's customer orientation and adaptive selling is mediated by adaptive selling confidence role ambiguity, intrinsic motivation and customer-qualification skills. -Adaptive selling behaviour increases outcome performance, customers' satisfaction with the product, and with the salesperson |

**Table 2 Empirical contributions on salesperson emergent behaviours in sales situations (continued)**

| Authors | Primary focus | Exigency/surprise approach to sales situation | Theoretical background | Key findings |
|---------|---------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| **Coelho et al. (2011)** | Investigates the antecedents of frontline employee creativity (intrinsic motivation, role ambiguity/conflict, job complexity and relationships with supervisors, colleagues and customers). | The broader context of work, not specific to customer conditions | Role theory Cognitive evaluative theory | -Intrinsic motivation, role conflict positively relates to creativity. -Role ambiguity contributes negatively to creativity -Job complexity positively direct effects creativity |
| **Lassk and Shepherd (2013)** | Examines the relationship between salespersons' emotional intelligence in sales situations, their creativity and sales performance | Generic reference to sales situations | Individual creativity | -Emotional intelligence is positively related to salesperson creativity in sales situations -Creativity is positively related to sales performance and job satisfaction |
| **Pryor et al. (2013)** | Examines salesperson listening in interactions with customers and how this changes over the course of long term relationships | Generic sales situations that stretch into the long term | Cognitive theory Interpersonal communication theory | -Salespersons listening behaviours affect customer perceptions of the salesperson' concern for them -Customer perception of salespersons' empathy contributes to building buyer-seller relationships. |
| **Agnihotri et al. (2013)** | Investigates drivers of boundary spanner creativity (knowledge, emotional intelligence, managerial feedback) and the implications for performance and customer problem solving | Generic reference to sales situations | Service-dominant logic | -Knowledge, emotional intelligence and managerial feedback drive creativity -Boundary spanner creativity is positively related to their performance and customer problem solving |

**Table 2 Empirical contributions on salesperson emergent behaviours in sales situations (continued)**

| Authors | Primary focus | Exigency/surprise approach to sales situation | Theoretical background | Key findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Román (2014)** | Dyadic study of how salesperson listening behaviour is shaped by control systems and customer | Generic salesperson-customer interactions | Cognitive evaluative theory | -Behaviour-based control system positively influences listening<br>-Salesperson's customer orientation mediates the effect of listening on customer loyalty to salesperson selling firm. |
| **Chen and Jaramillo (2014)** | Examines relationships emotional intelligence, adaptive selling and salesperson-owned customer loyalty | Generic reference to sales situations | --- | -Adaptive selling increases salesperson-owned loyalty<br>-Salesperson emotional regulation in sales situations negatively affects loyalty<br>Salesperson emotional regulation positively moderated the impact of adaptive selling on salesperson-owned loyalty |

## 2.4 Improvisation within organizational contexts

In the improvisation literature, there is consensus that it is occasioned by surprise, uncertainty and urgency (Cunha & Cunha, 2001; Magni et al., 2009). According to Cunha et al (1999), individuals improvise when they face situations for which no pre-determined courses of action exist. Hadida and Tarvainen (2014) also suggest that improvisation is fore-shadowed by individuals being stretched beyond their routines of behaviour. In other words, it is a response when individuals perceive mismatch between the expected and actual (see section 3.4 of Chapter 3 for conceptualizations of improvisation).

While this suggests unexpected and urgent situations as drivers of improvisation, it appears they are merely conduits, providing the climate in which the real antecedents facilitate improvisation. Improvisation scholars have identified several antecedents. Macro-level drivers of improvisation include environmental turbulence (positive) organizational memory (negative) (Moorman & Miner, 1998a) and information flows (conceptual) (Chelariu et al., 2002). Meso-level antecedents identified include team goal clarity (negative), team stability (positive), team work evaluation (positive) (Akgün et al., 2007) and environmental turbulence (Nunez & Lynn, 2012). Individual level drivers include motivation and ability to improvise (Kamoche et al., 2003); faith in intuition and need for cognition (Leybourne & Sadler-Smith, 2006); training (Vera & Crossan, 2005); service failure and existence of enabling structures (Cunha et al., 2009); supervisor support, improvisational self-efficacy and psychological empowerment (Nisula et al., 2015).

Relative to boundary conditions, Vera and Crossan (2005) identified team expertise, experimental culture, team-work quality and information flow. Moorman and Miner (1998a) report environmental turbulence, real-time information flow and organisational memory as conditioning the effects of improvisation on new product design effectiveness.

Similarly, Kyriakopoulos (2011) found that different types of memory (declarative and procedural) moderate the link between improvisation and cost efficiency, and new product market effectiveness. Similar to Vera and Crossan's (2005) finding on team information, Kyriakopoulos (2011) also established market information flow as a boundary condition. Akgün and Lynn (2002), on the other hand, found a positive moderating influence of environmental turbulence on the relationship between team improvisation and new product speed to market. Akgün et al. (2007) have also reported that information and knowledge mediate the relationship between team improvisation and new product success.

While a useful starting point, these findings display a bias towards new product development activities, limiting our ability to generalise findings to the sales domain. In addition, as Table 3 shows, there is a clear concentration of improvisation scholarship on higher levels of analysis, namely firm and team levels. This denies us of a deeper understanding of individual level improvisation. To the extent that firm and group level improvisations are themselves aggregations of individual improvisations, this dearth of individual level analysis limits our understanding. Accordingly, by abstracting the construct to the salesperson level, the study highlights individual improviser.

**Table 3 Summary of key (organizational) improvisation literature**

| Author | Domain | Theory | Dimensions | Level | Criterion variable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Crossan, Lane, White & Klus (1996) | Organization/ Management | Theatre metaphor Jazz metaphor | -- | Firm | -- |
| Moorman & Miner (1998a) | Organizational Learning | -- | Single | Firm | Action coherence, Speed Novelty |
| Moorman & Miner (1998b) | New Product Development | -- | Single | Team | New product effectiveness NPD process effectiveness |
| Weick (1998) | Organizational Management | Jazz metaphor | Single | Firm | -- |
| Crossan (1998) | Organizational Management | Theatre metaphor | -- | Firm | -- |
| Cunha et al 1999 | Organizational Management | Jazz metaphor | Single | Firm | Flexibility, Learning, Anxiety Motivation, Opportunity traps |
| Zack (2000) | Organization/Management | Jazz metaphor | Single | Firm | -- |
| Miner et al (2001) | Organizational Learning | -- | Single | Firm | Learning |
| Kamoche & Cunha (2001) | New Product Development | Jazz metaphor | Single | Firm | -- |
| Chelariu, Johnston & Young (2002) | Organizational learning | -- | Multi: Speed, Novelty, Coherence | Firm | External coherence |
| Kanter (2002) | Strategy | Theatre metaphor | -- | Firm | -- |
| Dennis & Macaulay (2003) | Marketing | Jazz metaphor | Single | Function/unit | -- |
| Kamoche, Cunha & Cunha (2003) | Organizational Management | Jazz/ Indian music metaphor Role theory | Single | Firm | Flexibility, Learning Innovation |
| Cunha, Kamoche & Cunha (2003) | Leadership | -- | Single | Team | -- |
| Vera & Crossan (2004) | Organizational Management | Theatre metaphor | Multi: Creativity, Spontaneity | Firm | -- |

**Table 3 Summary of key (organizational) improvisation literature (continued)**

| Author | Domain | Theory | Dimensions | Level | Criterion variable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vera & Crossan (2005) | Innovation | Theatre metaphor | Multi: Creativity, Spontaneity | Team | Team innovation |
| Crossan, Cunha, Vera & Cunha (2005) | Organizational management | Time metaphor | Multi: Creativity, Spontaneity | Firm | Firm performance |
| Hmieleski & Corbett (2006) | Entrepreneurship | -- | Multi: Spontaneity, Persistence Bricolage | Individual | Entrepreneurial intention |
| John, Grove & Fisk (2006) | Services | Jazz metaphor | Single | Firm/ Individual | Service recovery, Customer Satisfaction, Transcendence |
| Leybourne & Sadler-Smith (2006) | Project Management | Cognitive/ Self- theory | Multi: Intuition, creativity Bricolage | Individual | Project cost, Customer satisfaction |
| Akgün, Byrne, Lynn & Kirskin (2007) | New Product Development | -- | Single | Team | New product speed-to-market |
| Daly et al. (2009) | Services | Theatre metaphor | -- | Individual | Service recovery Work/Customer satisfaction |
| Dennis & Macaulay (2007) | Marketing | Jazz metaphor | Single | Firm | -- |
| Akgün & Lynn (2007) | NPD | -- | Single | Team | New product success |
| Hmieleski & Corbett (2008) | Entrepreneur-ship | Self-efficacy theory | Single | Individual Venture | Venture performance Entrepreneur work satisfaction |
| Samra et al. (2008) | New Product Development | -- | Single | Team | NPD speed New product success |
| Cunha, Rego & Kamoche (2009) | Services | -- | Single | Individual | Service recovery |
| Magni, Proserpio, Hoegl & Provera (2009) | Behaviour integration | -- | Multi: Creativity, Spontaneity | Individual | -- |
| Tjornehoj & Mathiassen (2010) | Information technology | -- | Single | Firm Individual | Employee creativity, Motivation, Goal deviation |

**Table 3 Summary of key (organizational) improvisation literature (continued)**

| Author | Domain | Theory | Dimensions | Level | Criterion variable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Magni, Provera & Proserpio (2010) | Information systems | -- | Multi: Creativity, Spontaneity | Individual | -- |
| Kyriakopoulos (2011) | New Product Development Innovation | -- | Single | Firm | Innovation cost efficiency Market effectiveness |
| Nemkova et al (2012) | Export | Resource Based View Contingency theory | Multi: Creativity, Spontaneity, Action | Export function | Export sales effectiveness |
| Nunez & Lynn (2012) | New Product Development | -- | Single | Team | NPD cost expectations |
| Cunha, Clegg & Kamoche (2012) | Strategy | -- | -- | Firm | -- |
| Lai, Lui & Hon (2014) | Services marketing | -- | Single | Firm | Solution relevance, Customer engagement, Solution novelty |
| Whalen & Boush (2014) | Marketing planning | -- | Single | Marketing function | Post-planning improvisation success |
| Nemkova et al (2015) | Export | Decision theory | Multi: Creativity, Spontaneity, Action | Export function | Customer performance Economic performance |
| Nisula, Humphreys & Humphreys (2015) | Innovation | -- | Single | Individual | Individual improvisation |

**2.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented an overview of the literature undergirding the thesis. It draws a trajectory of scholarly articulations of the factors that drive salesperson performance. Spanning three thematic streams, the chapter presented a bird's eye-view of the corpus of factors identified in the literature. Emphasis is placed on salesperson behaviours as a function of their boundary role. The chapter also reviews extant conceptualizations of improvisation within organisational settings.

# CHAPTER 3

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### 3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents a theoretical framework to delineate the relationships between salesperson improvisation and its key drivers, boundaries and outcomes. It starts off with a note on the preponderance of planned selling approaches in sales scholarship. It then presents descriptive decision theory as an alternative lens for understanding emergent selling behaviours. Using this theory, the researcher develops arguments to support the research hypotheses.

### 3.2 Theoretical background

Traditional personal selling wisdom suggests that effective selling follows systematic processes (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005; Weitz, 1978). This framework is highly pervasive in sales texts and practice, and continues to guide salesperson behaviours in routine sales encounters (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). However as Lai et al (2014) argue, for novel sales encounters, frontline employees must to do things differently to achieve responsiveness.

### 3.3 Decision-making theory

Decision scholarship suggests that individuals follow two main approaches in selecting their response behaviours: normative and descriptive. The normative approach views individuals' actions as flowing from a conception of "what ought to be the case" (Howard, 1988, p. 682) or as Simon puts it, "what to decide" as opposed to *how* to decide/act (1979, p. 498). At the very core of normative decision theory are

the concepts of rationality and optimality (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981). These highlight the basic fallibility of human choice capacity, and the need to generate norms to guide decision and behaviour.

While admitting to decision makers' bounded rationality, normative models seek to counter this by generating norms that routinize decision-making. Arguing that the decision process is inherently goal-driven (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981), this approach aims to make it easy, precise and more likely to generate results (Howard, 1988). The normative route to decision-making and the actions that flow from it, therefore, depend heavily on information accumulation and analysis. It views decision makers as seeking out patterns that surround choice situations. These patterns then define behaviours in subsequent similar situations. They become plans with clear start and end points (Simon, 1960).

Normative decision-making thus assumes a programmable essence in that it provides pre-emptive roadmaps to predict behaviour. Approaching decisions from a normative perspective, therefore, symbolizes decision makers' attempt to approach problems from an informed perspective to reduce error (Kunreuther et al., 2002).

Within the context of business, the normative view is exemplified by planning as a precursor to organisational action (Nemkova et al., 2012). As an organisational function, the sales unit also displays a similar bias for normative behaviours. This is exemplified by its emphasis on the sequential steps to effective selling (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005). Across the three major streams in sales scholarship discussed (see section 2.3), the predominant theoretical background leans towards planned salesperson behaviours. This tendency is so prevalent that even when articulating

contextual behaviour variables, sales scholars emphasise a planning orientation (e.g. Spiro & Weitz, 1990). For instance, in articulating the tenets of their adaptive selling behaviour construct, Spiro and Weitz (1990) highlight planning through market information generation and optimization. Weitz (1978) also presents a process model of selling-related tasks which emphasizes rational progression and sequential behaviours as the means of working smart. Planning is also a key criterion in salesperson behavioural performance evaluations (Baldauf & Cravens, 2002). Clearly, the normative approach to decision-making is pivotal to sales scholarship and practice.

Notwithstanding the contribution of normative decision-oriented sales research, evolutions in the sales role suggest that the descriptive decision logic may offer interesting perspectives. According to Ahearne, Jelinek and Jones (2007), today's salespersons are required not merely to meet sales targets. Rather, they must build long-term rewarding relationships through customer satisfaction. This, coupled with increased competition, means that salespersons cannot always afford the time to plan their every move as the normative approach suggests (Chonko et al., 2002).

Rather, it is the salespersons' ability to vary responses based on contextual requirements that may lead to selling success (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). According to Sohi (1996), salespersons need to devise situationally relevant solutions to rapidly changing customer needs. Thus, it appears that in the present time-pressured selling environment, theories of sales success need to account for the emergent context in which selling occurs.

Accordingly, this study draws on the second approach to decision-making, descriptive, which emphasizes context. According to descriptive decision-making theory, while

norms are useful they are neither always optimal nor practical. This is because, "deviations of actual behaviour … are too widespread to be ignored, too systematic to be dismissed as random error, and too fundamental to be accommodated by relaxing the normative system" (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986, p. 8252). Decisions are a function of "cognitive limitations, political processes, routines and environmental constraints" (Haley & Stumpf, 1989, p. 477). As such, descriptive decision-making requires attention to what is happening now as opposed to predicting what to do next (Wiltbank et al., 2006). Here, context gives meaning to tasks (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981) by shaping and reducing decision makers' bounded rationality.

Thus, rather than approaching decision situations with a set of prescriptions, the descriptive logic requires generalized problem solving skills, experience, and in-the-moment assessments of situations (Perkins & Rao, 1990). Descriptive decisions and the actions that flow from them are heuristic-based (Bramson, 2007) and spontaneous (Quinn, 1980). They function by replacing optimization with satisficing (Simon, 1979). As such, descriptive decision theory emphasizes reliance on intuitive judgements. Where decision tasks are surrounded by uncertainty and ambiguity, the descriptive logic is that intuitive judgement and context cues are optimal for task-relevant solutions (Kunreuther et al., 2002). Thus, rather than favouring norms over context (normative view) the descriptive view seeks understanding of situations and a reliance on intuitive guides and satisficing behaviours (Einhorn & Hogart, 1981).

### 3.4 Salesperson Improvisation: Definition and Dimensionality

This study argues that salesperson improvisation, being largely set in contexts of exigency and surprise, exemplifies a descriptive decision choice. Improvisation itself depicts the absence of pre-stipulated choice (Weick, 1998) and is employed in

situations "not seen ahead of time" (Akgün & Lynn, 2002, p. 117). It is initiated when individuals lack situational clarity or must deal with too many/too few interpretations of situations, making them think and act their way into clarity (Vera & Crossan, 2004). The term improvise comes from 'proviso', which refers to a provision made in advance of the occurrence of an event (Weick, 1998). The prefix 'im' serves to negate this structured meaning of 'proviso', creating a new meaning "not seen ahead of time" (Akgün & Lynn 2002, p. 117). In essence improvisation refers to the absence of predetermined stipulation.

Originating from the music industry where it is used to capture extempore artistic composition and performance (Kamoche & e Cunha, 2001), improvisation has been widely applied in organizational analysis. With the increased realization that organizational action can never be fully planned, often yielding to deviations from planned strategies, (Mintzberg, 1994; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986), scholars have sought to understand how organizational members improvise when strategy fails.

Various definitions of improvisation exist (see Table 4). It is defined as the formulation and implementation of resourceful solutions to intractable problems in the 'nick of time' (Meyer, 1998) in organizational research. In technology and change management it refers to attempts to accommodate everyday contingencies while education scholars define it as thinking in the middle of an action (Irby, 1992).

Moorman and Miner (1998a), who were the first to empirically assess it as a marketing behaviour, define improvisation as the convergence of composition and execution in time. Put simply, improvisation is the spontaneous and creative process of attempting to achieve an objective (Vera & Crossan, 2005). The creative aspect

relates to the solution generation process (composition) while spontaneity refers to the temporal execution process.

According to Moorman and Miner (1998a) whereas, ordinarily, action follows decision composition, in improvisation the two occur together such that the time gap between them narrows significantly. "The more proximate the design and implementation of an activity in time, the more that activity is improvisational" (Moorman & Miner, 1998a, p. 3). This essence is captured by Cunha et al (1999) who conceptualise improvisation as the conception of action as it unfolds.

Thus, within marketing, there is convergence on the notion that improvisation manifests as a merging of solution generation (creativity) and actioning (spontaneity). To improvise means to adjust one's work, in real time, to emerging information (Hadida & Tarvainen, 2014). By positioning improvisation as an unplanned behaviour drawing from heuristics and context, these definitions establish it as descriptive decision-based process.

However, there are disagreements regarding the dimensional structure of the construct. While earlier scholars viewed it as uni-dimensional (e.g. Moorman & Miner, 1998a), recent trends position it as a multi-dimensional construct (Nemkova et al., 2015). Among proponents of the multi-dimensional view, there are also inconsistencies regarding the specific sub-factors. For instance, Vera and Crossan (2005) defined improvisation as comprising creativity and spontaneity while Nemkova et al (2015; 2012) used creativity, spontaneity and action orientation. Hmieleski, Corbett & Baron (2013) defined improvisation as comprised of creativity, pressure (spontaneity) and action persistence. Some scholars also include bricolage and intuition (Leybourne &

Sadler-Smith, 2006). Others have also used speed, novelty and action coherence as dimensions (Chelariu et al., 2002).

**Table 4 Sample definitions of improvisation**

| Author | Definition | Discipline |
|---|---|---|
| **Barrett (1998)** | "… fabricating and inventing novel responses without a prescribed plan and without certainty of outcomes; discovering the future that [action] creates as it unfolds" (p.605) | Management |
| **Meyer (1998)** | "in the […] nick of time […] devising resourceful solutions to intractable problems" (p. 572) | Organization |
| **Weick (1998)** | "dea[ling] with the unforeseen, [working] without prior stipulation, [working] with the unexpected" (p.544) | Organization theory |
| **Crossan (1998)** | "Action […] taken in a spontaneous and intuitive fashion" (p. 593) | General Management |
| **Kamoche and Cunha (1998)** | "… the merging of composition and performance, where both happen contemporaneously" (p.5) | Product Innovation |
| **Moorman and Miner (1998b)** | "when the composition and execution of an action converge in time" (p.1) | New Product Development |
| **Eisenhardt (1997)** | "… organizing in a way such that the actors both adaptively innovate and efficiently execute. […] creating […] in real time" (p.255) | Decision-making and strategy |
| **Hatch (1997)** | "… intuition guiding action upon something in a spontaneous but historically contextualized way " (p. 181) | Management |
| **Orlilowski and Hoffman (1997)** | "… enacting an ongoing series of local innovations that embellish [a prescribed] structure, respond to spontaneous departures and unexpected opportunities, and iterate or build on each other over time" (p.13) | Organizational change |
| **Ciborra (1996)** | "… efficiently generate new combinations of resources, routines and structures which are able to match the present, turbulent circumstances" (p.104) | Organization structure |
| **Moorman and Miner (1995)** | '… extemporaneous and deliberate organizational action' (p.9) | Marketing |

*Adapted from Moorman and Miner (1998a)*

Across these conceptualizations, however, is an underlying agreement on creativity and spontaneity as the core elements of improvisation. Irrespective of which other dimensions scholars include, the creative and spontaneous elements are always present. As such, one could argue that these are the agreed core elements of the construct.

Accordingly this study defines salesperson improvisation as salesperson behaviours, in sales situations, that are not 'pre-scripted' but rather conceived and implemented

extempore. It involves the concurrent use of creativity (solution generation/thinking) and spontaneity (temporal execution) in emergent sales situations (Moorman & Miner 1998a, Vera & Crossan, 2005), making it multi-dimensional. In the following section, the dimensions of salesperson improvisation are discussed and positioned as exemplifying descriptive decision-based behaviour.

### 3.4.1 Salesperson creativity

According to Vera and Crossan (2004), fundamental to the process of improvisation is an effort to develop something in a new way. This notion is firmly rooted in Moorman and Miner's (1998a) definition of improvisation as inherently creative (behaviour composition). Although improvised behaviours may be novel, it suffices that the creative element manifests as modest shifts from routines, ideation processes or behaviour reconfiguration (Moorman & Miner, 1998a). Creativity itself refers to novel and situationally useful behaviours drawing from heuristic rather than algorithmic sources (Amabile, 1983).

At the centre of creativity are newness and situational value (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-Mcintyre, 2003) as it is often engendered by challenges in the course of work (Hirst, Van Knippenberg, & Zhou, 2009). In organisational settings, creativity encapsulates "a flow of novel but practically useful thoughts" (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004, p. 806) rather than enduring characteristics in individuals (Agnihotri, Rapp, Andzulis & Gabler, 2013). In other words, given differing conditions, every employee is capable of differing levels of creativity (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004).

In the sales domain, it is this emphasis on context that has necessitated academic attention to creativity. In conceptualising their salesperson creative performance

construct, Wang and Netemeyer (2004, p. 806) argue that contemporary sales situations are often "challenging and vaguely-structured". This is due to increased customer sophistication, higher standards of satisfaction (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005) and rising competition levels (Strutton, Pentina, & Pullins, 2009). As such, salespersons require creativity to appreciate latent and articulated customer needs (Homburg et al., 2009). More importantly, creativity enables salespersons to generate relevant solutions (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). Such creativity may manifest as generating new solutions, seeing old problems from different perspectives, defining and solving new problems or detecting a neglected problem (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004)

Because salesperson creativity eventuates in the face of challenge and situational ambiguity (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004), it could be viewed as a descriptive decision-based response. Salespersons exist at the organisational boundary (Srivastava & Tang, 2015) and are, often, the first in contact with customers' emergent problems. Being emergent, such problems are often not covered by existing strategy, requiring salespersons to use intuition, experience and contextual cues to generate new context-relevant solutions. Such "real-time" creativity (Strutton et al., 2009, p. 24), being heuristic, intuition-based and context-driven, thus, becomes a descriptive process to align firm resources to customers' needs (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000).

Empirical evidence supports the notion of a positive link between salesperson creativity and sales performance (see Agnihotri et al., 2013; Agnihotri, Rapp, & Gabler, 2015; Coelho & Sousa, 2011; Lassk & Shepherd, 2013). Notwithstanding the positive empirical evidence, conflicting and indirect effects have also surfaced. For instance, Martinaityte and Sacramento (2013) found that the salesperson creativity–

sales performance link is significant only by the activation of contingencies. There are also suggestions that creativity may take a turn for the negative (e.g. Ferguson, 2009; Ford & Sullivan, 2004).

### 3.4.2 Salesperson spontaneity

The second characteristic of improvisation is its spontaneous nature which manifests in impromptu action. In improvisation, behaviour is executed while it is being conceived. Thus, there is a substantive convergence between the two (Miner et al., 2001); a mere temporal sequence between composition and action is inadequate.

Rather improvised action must evidence "substantive fusion of design and execution" (Miner et al., 2001, p. 314). This is because improvisation is a time-based phenomenon activated when it is impossible to negotiate more response time (Crossan, Cunha, Vera, & Cunha, 2005), forcing improvisers to act in the moment (Vera & Crossan, 2004). Thus not only is improvisation creative, but such creativity is deployed in the nick of time, suggesting a spontaneous element as well.

The concept of spontaneity is often associated with individual volition, drawing from its Latin ancestor "Sponte" which means "of one's freewill" (George & Brief, 1992, p. 310). As such, employee spontaneous behaviours are defined as extra-role behaviours performed voluntarily to contribute to organizational effectiveness (George & Brief, 1992). Spontaneity taken in this sense manifests when employees help colleagues, protect the organization, develop themselves, spread good will and make constructive suggestions. The closest correlates of this view of spontaneity include citizenship behaviour (Organ, 1988) and pro-social behaviour (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986).

While providing useful pointers to the meaning and scope of spontaneity, this view of the construct is not what is sought in this study. Rather, this study draws from its conceptualization, in improvisation scholarship, as the extemporaneous quality of an action (Baker, Miner, & Eesley, 2003). Noticeable parallels exist between the two notions of spontaneity, however. Like its application in improvisation scholarship, spontaneous behaviour conceived of as extra role (George & Brief, 1992) and contextual (George & Jones, 1997) suggests its un-scripted nature.

Spontaneity is used in this thesis to refer to the impulsive energy which propels individuals to act, presumably without second thought or self-doubt (Davelaar, Araujo, & Kipper, 2008). According to Wyatt (1988) spontaneity, being impulsive, is characterised by an absence of self-judging. Dickman (1990) describes it as functional impulsivity that engenders impromptu action in response to opportunities. Due to its impulsive and unscripted nature, spontaneity is deployed in contexts that are exigent. Because such conditions are urgent, it is impossible to negotiate more response time (Crossan et al., 2005) forcing improvisers to intuitively take satisficing action. Being impulsive and intuitive is what establishes spontaneity as a descriptive decision-based behaviour.

For salespersons, because they are often the first to know of customers' urgent problems, they face pressure to take timely action (Chonko et al., 2002). The urgent nature of such situations means there is no time for strategy formulation and evaluation. Rather, responses must be implemented in the moment to account for the urgency in the situation. Spontaneity, thus, becomes the means for such action.

Across various study domains, several studies have highlighted spontaneity as a dimension of the improvisation construct. These include Hmieleski and Corbett, (2006) from entrepreneurship, Nemkova et al (2015) from exporting and Vera and Crossan (2005) from innovation literatures. However, only Nemkova et al (2015) have explored its unique implications. Their study, being in the export domain, limits our ability to generalise their findings to the sales context.

Within the sales literature, itself, the implications of salespersons' spontaneous responses to urgent situations remains to be examined. The literature review conducted as part of this study found no specific study testing the effects of salesperson spontaneity. In spite of these lapses, evidence from the literature on customer waiting time suggests possible links between salespersons' spontaneous responses and performance.

For instance, Tom and Lucey (1997) found that customers rate their satisfaction by the extent of time spent waiting for solutions. Similar findings were uncovered by Peritz (1993) who reports that customers rate response time highly when evaluating their shopping experience. As such, where time is of the essence, spontaneity should reduce customer waiting time, and increase their satisfaction.

Katz, Larson and Larson (1991) also make an interesting argument about customer perceptions of waiting time. According to them, when it comes to customer satisfaction, perception equates reality. This is such that if customers perceive their wait times to be short, then it is short irrespective of how long it actually was. In that sense, by activating spontaneous responses and reducing customer waiting time, improvising salespersons stand a better chance of customer satisfaction.

The preceding discussions establish the dimensions of salesperson improvisation as descriptive decision-based behaviours that rely on intuition, heuristics, experience and contextual cues. Faced with market conditions that require improvisation, their reliance on intuitive, spontaneous and heuristic based judgements and actions exemplifies descriptive choice. In such situations, the litmus test for sales success depends not just on how much planning they started off with, but their ability to make and act on context-relevant (descriptive) choices. (Cunha, et al., 1999; Moorman & Miner, 1998a).

## 3.5 Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

The main objective of this study is to examine salesperson improvisation relative to its drivers, boundary conditions and consequences. Consequently, it is necessary to identify constructs that form its nomological net. Drawing from descriptive decision theory, this section presents arguments depicting the mechanisms that govern linkages between salesperson improvisation and key variables.

Having established creativity and spontaneity as unique dimensions, constructs within salesperson improvisation's nomological net are articulated relative to their relationships with these individual dimensions. In the sections that follow, the researcher delineates the unique implications of salesperson self-efficacy, experience and autonomy for the dimensions of salesperson improvisation. This is followed by a discussion of how the two dimensions are related to sales performance and the boundary conditions thereof. The logic of this approach lies in the opportunity to clarify disagreements in the broader improvisation literature regarding its value for marketers. Figure 2 depicts the relationships discussed.

**Figure 2 Conceptual framework**
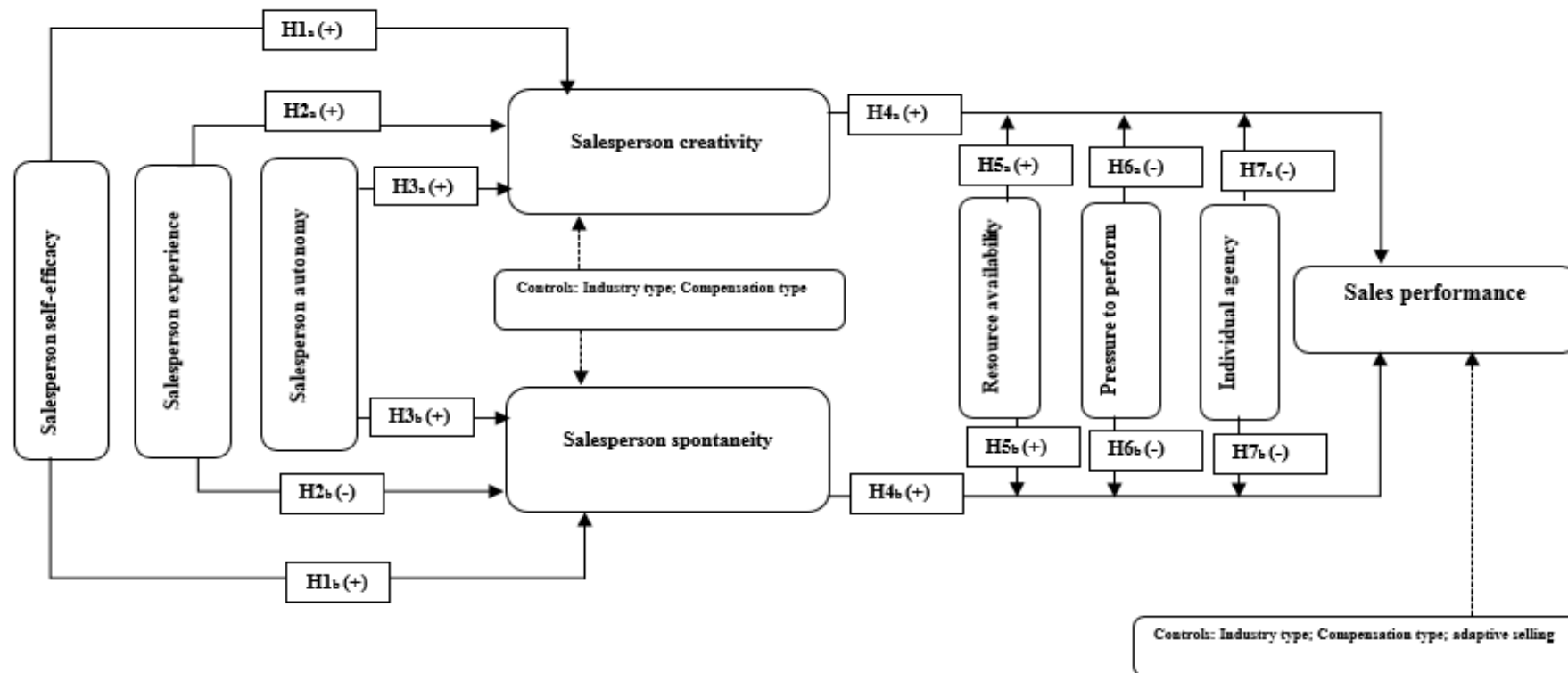
### 3.5.1 Antecedents of salesperson improvisation

Extant sales literature suggests that salespersons' contextual behaviours are in response to factors residing mainly at firm and individual levels (Bonney & Williams, 2009; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). This section highlights three such factors, drawn from the descriptive decision theory, which are critical to the specific context of salesperson improvisation. The study argues that salespersons' (1) self-efficacy, (2) experience and (3) autonomy levels are key drivers of salesperson improvisation's dimensions. Specifically, it argues that at the critical point where salespersons must make the call to improvise, self-efficacy produces the motivational drive while experience presents the basket of tools from which to select and reconfigure solution options (Burke & Miller, 1999). Lastly, autonomy provides the mental freedom to take improvisational actions.

Their inclusion in the model draws from allusions to them in the sales literature as drivers of emergent behaviours (Bonney & Williams, 2009; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004), and linkages between them and intuitive, descriptive decision-based behaviours (Bell, Raiffa & Tversky, 1988; Burke & Miller, 1999). The study recognises that these factors do not exhaust the possible drivers of salesperson improvisation. However, in the researcher's guided opinion, based on existing theory, they are the most critical.

### 3.5.1.1 Salesperson self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to judgements about individuals' capability to effectively respond to situations (Bandura, 1982). Different from actual skills held for effective response, efficacy operates at the evaluative level to prescribe to individuals a sense of what they can handle. The resulting conviction can both facilitate and inhibit behaviour as

individuals tend to approach or avoid situations they deem to be manageable or not, respectively (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

This study anticipates a positive link between self-efficacy and creativity in situations requiring improvisation. According to Bandura (1997), a strong sense of efficacy is a pre-condition for creative behaviour. Creative self-efficacy, "the self-view that one has the ability to produce creative outcomes" (Tierney & Farmer, 2011, p. 277), provides the internal, sustaining force needed to persevere in challenging situations requiring creativity (Gong, Huang & Farh, 2009; Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Without efficacy and the accompanying drive, salespersons facing unexpected and urgent situations would resort to avoidance behaviours rather than creative responses (Bandura, 1977). On the other hand, high efficacy leads to greater situational cue search, memory recall and effort to find and apply creative solutions (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). The preceding arguments support the expectation that:

*H1a: there is a positive relationship between salesperson self-efficacy and salesperson creativity during improvisation.*

Similarly, self-efficacy is expected to positively drive the incidence of spontaneous responses as part of the salesperson improvisation process. Self-efficacy is task-specific (George & Jones, 1997), working to assure individuals of the capability to self-motivate and mobilize the cognitive resources and actions relevant to situations (Wood & Bandura, 1989). As such, where efficacy is high, salespersons should be driven to initiate action when it matters. Conversely, faced with unexpected situations requiring urgent action, low efficacious salespersons would judge themselves to require more time for effective response and would, therefore, be unlikely to initiate spontaneous action.

Besides, given the situational ambiguity in unexpected and urgent situations, low efficacious salespersons would be unsure of their ideas making them prone to fear of failure, a condition that slows their reaction time (Gist, 1989). This line of thinking is grounded in George and Jones' (1997, p. 159) argument that "high self-efficacy will create more opportunities for spontaneity and low self-efficacy will constrain spontaneity", supporting the expectation that:

*H1b: there is a positive relationship between salesperson self-efficacy and salesperson spontaneity during improvisation.*

### 3.5.1.2 Salesperson experience

Experience entails the accumulation of job-related knowledge and task proficiency (Quińones et al., 1995). Relative to its implications for improvisation, it is expected to enhance creativity and reduce spontaneity. First, as experience increases, salespersons gain exposure to diverse situations which produces a stock of response options (Fu, 2009). In exigent situations, therefore, experienced salespersons have a wider pool of solutions from which to intuitively draw and generate creative reconfigurations. Similarly, experience enhances salespersons' emotional intelligence (the ability to decode situations and make emotional connections with customers). With such emotional intelligence, salespersons gain deeper insights into customers' unarticulated needs (Lassk & Shepherd, 2013), as well as unconventional means of resolving them.

Importantly, experienced salespeople may judge themselves as better predictors of customers' reactions to their unconventional solutions, making them more willing to try creative solutions (Agnihotri et al., 2009). Conversely, less experienced salespersons are limited in their ability to diagnose sales situations for relevant creative responses (Agnihotri et al., 2009). Thus it is hypothesized that:

*H2a: there is a positive relationship between salesperson experience and salesperson creativity during improvisation.*

While experience increases creativity in exigent conditions, the opposite is expected relative to salesperson spontaneity. As salespersons grow in confidence, they become less amenable to acting on new tasks (Atuahene-Gima, 1997). Experienced salespeople are prone to becoming 'creatures of habit' (Fu, 2009), a condition that disposes them towards more systematic rather than spontaneous behaviours.

As such, while experienced salespersons can decipher sales situations faster (see preceding arguments on creativity), their accumulation of 'the way things are always done' may reduce their reaction time (Robinson et al., 2005; Strutton et al., 2009). This is because as people learn about how things ought to be done, they also develop associative barriers (persistent, naturally-arising, deeply-internalized obstacles) to stop them from veering off (Strutton et al., 2009). With such barriers in place, situations requiring risky, spur-of-the-moment actions are less likely to activate the spontaneous response drive. Accordingly, it is expected that:

*H2b: there is a negative relationship between salesperson experience and salesperson spontaneity during improvisation.*

### 3.5.1.3 Salesperson autonomy

Salesperson autonomy refers to the level of control that salespersons have over their selling activities (Wang & Netemeyer, 2002). Autonomy draws from leadership empowerment behaviours (Ahearne et al., 2005; Auh, Menguc & Jung, 2014) as managers cede decision-making power to salespersons. It manifests as managers increasing salespersons' control over their actions to allow contextual flexibility (Ahearne et al., 2005).

For the salesperson, increased autonomy means the "license to produce novel ideas for solving customer problems using idiosyncratic product bundles" (Bonney & Williams, 2009, p. 1040). According to Auh et al (2014), when managers empower frontline employees with decision power, the latter are likely to go the extra mile in developing unscripted customer solutions. Because, they do not fear reproach, autonomous salespersons are not held back when situations require creative solutions. Rather, they are mentally free to take risks, and would more readily resort to creative solutions in unexpected and urgent situations (Amabile et al., 1996). This line of reasoning finds support in Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby and Herron's (1996), assertion that creativity is fostered when employees enjoy power over their choices and actions.

Secondly, autonomy drives creativity by activating motivation and ego involvement (Deci & Ryan, 1987). Autonomous individuals feel personally responsible for the situations over which they have control and would go to extra lengths to achieve success (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Thus, given situations for which behavioural blue prints are lacking, autonomous salespersons' sense of responsibility would drive them to unconventional solutions in their effort to win. Together, the received wisdom leads to the expectation that:

*H3a:    there is a positive and direct relationship between salesperson autonomy and salesperson creativity during improvisation.*

Variation in levels of salesperson autonomy is also expected to cause change in levels of salesperson spontaneity. The logic backing this argument is two-fold. First, the state of ego involvement engendered by autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1987) leads people to pressure themselves into action by assigning temporal relevance to situations (Ryan, 1982). By judging situations to be directly tied to their success, autonomous

salespersons interpret their inability to meet the time demands as failure. Under exigent situations, therefore, they would want to take action when such action can still make a difference.

High autonomy also means freedom to take risks and act when situations call for action. Conversely, low autonomy means salespersons are held back by managerial controls and must wait for approval before taking action, reducing the opportunity for spontaneous response (Ahearne et al., 2005). As such, as autonomy increases, so does salespersons' ability to vary their selling behaviours to achieve timely responsiveness (Ahearne et al., 2005). Early experimental evidence supports this by showing that individuals are more spontaneous when operating in autonomous environments (Koestner et al., 1984). These suggest that:

*H3b:    there is a positive and direct relationship between salesperson autonomy and salesperson spontaneity during improvisation.*

### 3.5.2 The salesperson improvisation–sales performance relationship

As previously discussed, while creativity and spontaneity are both components of salesperson improvisation, they each may have unique meanings and differential consequences. Specific to this study, the concern was to understand the nature of the relationships between salesperson improvisation dimensions and sales performance. As a result, in the sections that follow, the unique mechanisms underpinning the relationships between salesperson creativity and spontaneity, and sales performance are hypothesized. These are followed by arguments pertaining to the boundary conditions.

In the sales context, sales performance refers to salespersons' output relative to key indices set by management and derived from market information and individuals' past

performance (Ahearne et al., 2008). Indices used for monitoring salesperson performance include overall sales, expansions in market share, and expansions in share of business with key clients and sales of high profit margin products (Wang & Miao, 2014). As the key criteria for salesperson compensation and upward mobility within firms (Mowen et al., 1985), sales performance represents the ultimate target of salespersons' behaviours.

### 3.5.2.1 Salesperson creativity and sales performance

Wang and Netemeyer (2004) proposed a model of salesperson creative performance as a positive predictor of sales performance. Following this, several scholars have found evidence supporting this line of reasoning (Agnihotri et al., 2015; Agnihotri et al., 2013; Lassk et al., 2013; Strutton et al., 2009). The logic is that the descriptive decision roots of intuition and reliance on contextual cues enable creative outputs to be responsive to emergent situations (Amabile, 1983). Thus, the ability to apply creativity towards timely responsiveness should enable salespersons to satisfy customers and sell more. Conversely, low creativity levels erode this benefit.

Secondly, with customer problems increasing in diversity and complexity (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004), salespersons' creativity in unravelling both latent and articulated customer needs becomes a recipe for success (Homburg et al., 2009). In addition, because salesperson creativity can yield unique outcomes (differentiated solutions), it increases their selling advantage (by depressing competitors' ability to make similar offers), enabling them to sell more. Accordingly, it is expected that:

*H4a: salesperson creativity during improvisation is positively related to sales performance.*

**3.5.2.2 Salesperson spontaneity and sales performance**

According to Lassk and Shepherd (2013), the nature of customers with whom salespersons must deal today places on them (salespersons) a greater responsibility to be able to think on their feet. Customers have become more knowledgeable and demanding (Lassk & Shepherd, 2013). In addition, they define satisfaction by the timeliness of solutions (Tom & Lucey, 1997). This places salespersons under pressure to implement timely solutions. To do this, salespersons require spontaneity to take action when it matters. To the extent that fast decisions enable individuals to keep pace with changing market conditions (Eisenhardt, 1989), spontaneity should increase sales success.

Secondly, by enabling timeliness, spontaneous action enables salespersons to 'save the day' for customers faced with exigencies (Weick, 1998). This increases customers' faith in the salespersons' capability (Meyer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995) and munificence (Doney & Cannon, 1997), a condition that should strengthen the relationship and lead to future sales. Spontaneity also yields surprise (Moreno & Moreno, 1944) to the competition, which in turn may yield competitive advantage (Breakspear, 2013). Therefore, salespersons' ability to apply spontaneous responses in exigent situations should enhance their success. Accordingly, it is expected that:

*H4b: salesperson spontaneity during improvisation is positively related to sales performance.*

**3.5.3 Boundary conditions**

While it is largely accepted that improvisation can enhance competitiveness (Nemkova et al., 2012), it has also been found to have negative implications (see Kyriakopoulos, 2011; Moorman & Miner, 1998a). Such findings suggest that by itself, improvisation may not be dramatic in its benefits, tending rather to vary as a function

of contingencies (Vera & Crossan, 2005; Miner et al., 2001). At the individual level, a multitude of factors may be implicated in this relationship. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to explore all such considerations. As such, drawing insights from practitioner interviews, descriptive decision theory (Bell, Raiffa & Tversky, 1988; Burke & Miller, 1999; Schwienhorst, 2009) and literature (Bonney & Williams, 2009; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004), the study examines three boundary factors which are especially relevant to the specific context of improvisation − resource availability, pressure to perform and individual agency.

### 3.5.3.1 The moderating role of resource availability

Sales resources refer to marketing, financial and other resources required for executing sales related tasks effectively (Plouffe & Barclay, 2007). They include both tangible (e.g. sales support personnel, product literature, and sales expenses) and intangible (e.g. time and attention of a firm's senior management) options (Bonney & Williams, 2009; Plouffe & Barclay, 2007). This study argues that the effectiveness of salesperson improvisation varies depending on high or low perception of resource availability.

Sales resource levels can both weaken and facilitate the consequences of creativity during improvisation. When resources are abundant, salespersons have the means to implement their creative ideas and follow them through to completion (Bonney & Williams, 2009) to satisfy customers and drive sales. Conversely, lean resources constrain individuals to adhere to plans as firms become less tolerant of deviations (Covin, Slevin, & Schultz, 1997). For instance, where creative ideas require additional support staff to implement, salespersons operating with lean resources would fail to deploy such solutions to be able to leverage the benefits thereof.

While the study recognises that necessity can foster invention (Gibbert, Hoegl & Valikangas, 2014), making scarcity opportunistic, Cunha et al (2014, p.203), argue that such opportunity exists only for those who can "enact the potentiality contained in surrounding dormant resources". Creative ideas need to be implemented in order for them to impact sales and resources are the means to that end. Critically, applying creative solutions with limited resources risks imperfect solutions and failure to satisfy customers (Baker & Nelson, 2005). Imperfect solutions also increase the risk of incurring customer displeasure (Yeboah Banin et al., 2016), thereby reducing sales. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:

*H5a The positive relationship between salesperson creativity and sales performance is stronger when improvising salespersons have a high perception of resource availability.*

Similarly, it is expected that the hypothesized positive relationship between salesperson spontaneity during improvisation and sales performance should receive a boost when salespersons feel adequately resourced. Where response time is of the essence (Backhouse & Burns, 1999), the perception of resource adequacy should give impetus to action (Diefendorff, 2004). In the exigency contexts where improvisation is set, improvisers cannot afford to wait to assemble optimal resources (Baker & Nelson, 2005).

As such, resource adequacy should enable salespersons take action on time (Weick, 1996), thereby increasing their responsiveness (Cunha et al., 2014). For instance, given financial resource flexibility, salespersons can offer incentives and discounts to customers to secure urgent sales deals and increase sales growth (Yeboah Banin et al., 2016). In addition, being spontaneous with the right basket of resources should

increase salespersons' chance of producing unique solutions that yield competitive advantage and drive sales. Accordingly, it is expected that:

*H5b    The positive relationship between salesperson spontaneity and sales performance is stronger when improvising salespersons have a high perception of resource availability.*

### 3.5.3.2 The moderating role of pressure to perform

Salespersons face intense pressure as they are expected to contribute, in measurable ways, towards firm growth (Schwepker & Ingram, 1996). Pressure to perform represents expectations and demands communicated to the salesperson by colleagues and superiors (Tyagi, 1985). It may manifest as heavy workloads, time pressure, high sales quotas and output tracking systems that openly compare the individual's performance with others (Hunter & Thatcher, 2007).

Salespersons' perception of pressure to perform has direct implications for how they execute their roles and the results thereof (Tyagi, 1985). This study argues that the effectiveness of salesperson improvisation varies as a function of pressure to perform. It is expected that pressure to perform exerts an overall negative influence on the salesperson improvisation–performance link. Given the bounded rationality that surrounds descriptive behaviours, and the fact that people are naturally cognitive misers (Fiske & Taylor, 2013), pressure to perform should dispose them to errors and sales losses. This is because while employing improvised creative solutions, pressured salespersons, though limited by their lack of situational clarity, may fail to exert the needed effort for creative solution search as they are in a hurry to move to the next task.

Secondly, salesperson creativity during improvisation should suffer in its effectiveness with intense felt pressure. When salespersons feel they are 'in over their heads'

regarding their ability to meet expectations, they lose their sense of instrumentality (being able to make a difference) (Jones et al., 2007; Tyagi, 1985). As a result, they may be limited in the depth of creative solution applied as well as the effort expended to see creative ideas through. This should reduce the overall efficacy of the creativity employed as well as the opportunity to leverage any inherent benefits.

Under intense pressure, salespersons also risk failure to stay in emergent situations long enough to creatively resolve them. Whereas salespersons enjoy more time flexibility than other employees, pressured ones must attend to too many things at a time (Jones et al., 2007). This reduces their ability to devote adequate time to generating and applying creative solutions. Given the sales benefits of dedicating adequate effort to resolving sales situations (Jaramillo & Muilki, 2008), pressured salespersons' tendency to rush over those requiring creative solutions would reduce the possibility of such benefits. This suggests that:

*H6a: The positive relationship between salesperson creativity and sales performance is weakened when salespersons perceive a high level of pressure to perform.*

Similarly, this study expects pressure to perform to negate the benefits of salesperson spontaneity during improvisation. Pressured salespersons' tendency to treat emergent situations in a transient manner (Jones et al., 2007) would be aggravated in situations requiring spontaneous responses. Because spontaneous behaviour is impulsive (Taute & McQuitty, 2004), performance pressure may heighten such impulsivity to an extent where choices become haphazard. Thus, pressured improvising salespersons would reach for breadth rather than depth when applying spontaneous responses, exposing them to sales losses (Hughes, 2013). Under pressure, improvising salespersons are

driven to achieve more ticks in boxes, predisposing them to impulsive snap shot responses that fail to satisfy customers (Taute & McQuitty, 2004).

Pressured salespersons applying spontaneous responses may also resort to coercive tactics (e.g. inducements, threats of sanctions for not purchasing specified offers) (McFarland, 2003) and unethical behaviour (Robertson & Rymon, 2001) to boost short-term sales. While sometimes successful, in the long run, such sales-oriented rather than customer oriented selling (Saxe & Weitz, 1982) decreases buyer trust (Boyle & Dwyer, 1995) and sales output (McFarland, 2003). Accordingly it is hypothesized that:

*H6b: The positive relationship between salesperson spontaneity and sales performance is weakened when salespersons perceive a high level of pressure to perform.*

### 3.5.3.3 The moderating role of individual agency

Because descriptive decision-based behaviours shift from planned strategies, individuals' attitudes to planned versus *ad hoc* choice may be critical in conditioning the boundaries of salesperson improvisation. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989) suggests that individuals high in agency predisposition are more attuned to planned behaviours and may experience discomfort as a function of deviations (Bandura, 2001). Defined as a drive to shape one's life outcomes, individual agency depicts an urge not merely to undergo experiences, but to generate and contribute to such in a result-oriented way (Ling & Dale, 2013). According to Paternoster and Pogarsky (2009, p. 105), "persons acting with human agency make choices and enforce these choices on the world".

Two elements underpin individual agency which, this study argues, should shape the outcomes of salesperson improvisation. The first, intentionality, drives individuals to

match their behaviours to desired goals and persist in effort until they are achieved. High agency individuals are also self-reflective, constantly assessing the extent of compatibility between their actions and goals (Bandura, 2001). Together, these traits expose them towards over emphasizing pre-defined details to the detriment of contextual responsiveness. Consequently, this study argues that not only does intentionality drive contextual inflexibility, but also self-reflectiveness increases negative affect where situations demand deviation from planned goals.

High agency salespersons would be inhibited, by their intentionality tendencies, from leveraging the full benefits of their creativity. With high agency, salespersons deploying creative responses to unexpected and urgent situations may find it disruptive of their self-defined behaviour targets (Ferguson, 2009). This may generate negative affect that may interfere with their ability to effectively execute their creative ideas. As such, they would fail to leverage the benefits of creativity in resolving emergent sales situations.

High agency may also negate the 'naturalness' of creative solutions. During the rather unstructured process of creative solution ideation and application, salespersons need the mental freedom to make corrective context-led adjustments (Amabile, 1996). Where agency forces adherence to intended goals and constant self-reflection (Bandura 2006), salespersons may miss creative opportunities that 'wow' customers (Lee & Tan, 2012) and drive sales growth. This is because self-reflection interferes with salespersons' attentiveness to context by creating "off-task thoughts" (Martin & Tesser, 1996, p. 12) and reducing the task focus instrumental in producing creative performance (Brown, Jones & Leigh, 2005).

Similarly, while ordinarily, agency is beneficial by making choices purposeful, Bagozzi, Belschak and Verbeke (2010) argue that it makes salespersons appear ruthless and selfish to their customers, a condition that could drive sales losses. Conversely, low agency salespersons are flexible to context-led deviations from planned goals and mentally freer to see their creative ideas through (Amabile, 1996). This should inure to their benefit by enhancing their responsiveness and sales growth. These arguments support the expectation that:

*H7a: The positive relationship between salesperson creativity and sales performance is weakened as a function of individual agency.*

Similarly, agency is expected to hamper the benefits of salesperson spontaneity during improvisation. Self-reflectiveness reduces the ability to be naturally spontaneous by heightening a preoccupation with choice details to the neglect of real-time responsiveness (Bandura, 2006). As salespersons spend mental effort comparing the fit between their choices and personal goals, their opportunity to leverage spontaneity weakens. This is because while employing spontaneous responses, their tendency towards contextual inflexibility may interfere with their ability to take the customers' viewpoint (Bagozzi et al., 2010), a condition that may be punished by customers. As such, it is expected that:

*H7b: The positive relationship between salesperson spontaneity and sales performance is weakened as a function of individual agency.*

### 3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the study. Using the decision-making theory in general and the logic of descriptive decision-making, the chapter explains how improvisation is linked to constructs within its

nomological net. A research model is developed based on which a series of hypotheses are presented.

# CHAPTER 4

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter outlines the philosophical basis of the study as well as the methodological choices made in conducting it. The chapter starts off with a brief introduction to the philosophy guiding the research followed by a description of the research design. Lastly, the chapter details the specific tactical choices made relative to questionnaire design, sampling, data collection and analysis, and criteria used to assure the overall quality of the research and its findings.

### 4.2 Ontological and epistemological debates

Social science research is the result of complex interplays between certain basic philosophical considerations. To a large extent, researchers' philosophical orientations guide their study of social phenomena. Though not always explicitly stated, researchers' view of what knowledge is guides their choices about what to study and how to go about studying it. Thus, the ontological debate is critical in understanding the scope and conduct of social science research.

Ontology, the philosophical study of reality seeks to answer questions about what exists, what units make it up and what it looks like. For the individual social science researcher, their view of what is an accurate answer to these questions becomes the ontological foundations shaping their products (research) (Weed, 2009).

Drawing directly from ontological beliefs are the equally important epistemological consideration dealing with questions of how knowledge of the social world can be effectively acquired (Blaikie, 2007). In other words, it is not enough to establish the nature of social phenomena, but also how knowledge about them can be accurately attained. Both assumptions are critical in determining the phenomena that social scientists study and how they defend the value of their work. At a functional level, ontological and epistemological persuasions produce the corpus of methodological strategies that adherents adopt in the conduct of their research (Grix, 2002).

Within social science, two main ontological foundations exist, until recently, in opposition to each other (Tsai & Liu, 2005). The first, empiricism, perceives reality as an objective existence such that the empirical world and the social entities acting in it are thought to be external to observer (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). Social phenomena, according to empiricists are empirically distinguishable, self-producing and capable of recurrence. By implication, knowledge about such phenomena can be procured objectively and shared with accuracy (Weed, 2009). Drawing from the view of social phenomena as recurrent, empiricists believe that the resulting pattern formation is a basis for scientific observation, generalization and prediction.

Flowing logically from this empiricist viewpoint is positivism, the epistemological assumption that objective knowledge of social reality can be attained through natural science processes. This assumption manifests itself as quantitative strategies for observing social patterns and generating law-like predictions about them (e.g. descriptive and explanatory research) (Malhotra, 2012). Procedures followed are mainly based on logical analysis where empirical evidence precedes knowledge claims (Skinner & Kelley, 2006).

On the other end of the ontological spectrum is the constructivist view that social reality is the result of interactions between the observed, the observer and the observation process. Constructivism suggests that social phenomena and their meanings are in continuous flux as they result from social interactions which themselves are not static (Gergen, 1985). Its epistemological approach, interpretivism, therefore seeks nuanced and unstructured understanding of social phenomena rather than law-like generalizations. It is this understanding of the nature of the social world that shapes the conduct of qualitative (exploratory) research.

It is useful to mention that there is a growing attention to more 'middle-of-the-line' approaches. Here, the benefits of both empiricist and constructivist perspectives are combined in research; the mixed methods approach. It draws from realist/pragmatist ontology which views reality as both independent (of the observer) and constructible (between observer and observed).

## 4.3 Philosophical foundations of the study

From the preceding discussions, it is clear that any study seeking to understand and predict the nature, prevalence and consequences of social phenomena draws on the empiricist ontology. Accordingly, given the nature and present state of knowledge on main construct, this study adopts an empiricist/objectivist standpoint. Within organizations, it is established that improvisation exists as a behaviour (see Nemkova et al., 2015; Kyriakopoulos, 2011; Vera & Crossan, 2005; Moorman & Miner, 1998a).

Thus, the design of this research is premised on the assumption that improvisation exists as an objective reality observable through the behaviours of organizations and

their members (Cunha et al., 1999; Moorman & Miner, 1998a). Flowing from this ontology, the processes used in the conduct of this study follow the quantitative approach. In following this philosophy, this study is also consistent with a long tradition of positivist-oriented sales scholarship (Skinner & Kelley, 2006).

## 4.4. Cross -sectional research design

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design involving the collection of data from large numbers of people each responding to the same list of questions. In cross-sectional studies, respondents complete one-off surveys which are then used for descriptive and explanatory purposes. This design is popular among both marketing academics and practitioners as it allows inferences from large samples.

An assessment of the relative popularity of survey design in the publications of two top marketing journals (*Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of Marketing Research*) found that it was used in 30% of the sample. Of these, 94% were cross-sectional (Rindfleisch, Malter, Ganesan & Moorman, 2008). As such, cross sectional surveys are very common in many disciplines including sales and form the basis of most of what we know (Rindfleisch et al., 2008).

In spite of its wide spread popularity, cross-sectional surveys are susceptible to challenges that researchers must guard against. They are prone to common method variance (CMV) which can render research findings weak (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To remedy this, methodology scholars recommend the use of multiple respondents, variations in question formats and scale anchors as well as longitudinal designs (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

While this study makes a conscious effort to apply some of these suggestions, it is important to justify the choice of the cross-sectional research design in spite of its challenges. First, cross-sectional surveys remain popular because the extent to which the bias element actually alters observed relationships is debatable. Malhotra and Peterson (2006) found that even though CMV was present in survey data, its effect was not substantial.

Similarly, Rindfleisch et al (2008) found that under certain conditions, the validity of findings from cross-sectional data is comparable to that of longitudinal data. As such, the cross-sectional design, if conducted well, can enable reliable inferences.. Importantly for this study, the choice of the cross-sectional design was also informed by practical considerations. Due to infrastructural challenges in the study setting (Ghana), the survey instrument was administered in person. This presented high operational budgetary constraints for which reason a longitudinal design was impractical. Informed by these considerations, therefore, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey design and included some checks to reduce its vulnerability to CMV.

A retrospective questionnaire was used in which respondents were asked to answer questions with previously encountered scenarios in mind. Adopting Golden's (1992) strategies for reducing errors in retrospective accounts, the researcher asked respondents to focus on their actual behaviours rather than their beliefs. In addition, question formats and sequencing were varied to avert any chances of respondents guessing hypothesized relationships.

**4.5 Questionnaire design**

The research instrument used in this study is the result of careful adherence to long trusted psychometric procedures. Following Churchill's (1979) recommendations, specific procedures were followed to ensure that the scales provided adequate coverage of the relevant variables. In the sections that follow, a detailed discussion of these processes is presented.

**4.5.1 Information sought from respondents**

One primary concern in the development of the research instrument was the need to capture the full breadth of the main constructs in the conceptual model. Thus, the initial questionnaire design process focused on a thorough literature search of existing measures of salesperson improvisation. However, because improvisational behaviours by salespersons have not been engaged in the literature, appropriate measures were non-existent. Fortunately, improvisation has been studied in the marketing literature (see Nemkova et al., 2015; Nomkova et al., 2012; Kyriakopoulos, 2011; Vera & Crossan, 2005; Moorman & Miner, 1998a).

As such, there existed a sizeable corpus of improvisation scales that could guide the development of a new salesperson improvisation measure. However, since this body of research mainly considered the construct at the firm level, it required that existing scales be adapted to fit the individual level of analysis and, more so, its application to the sales role.

Secondly, owing to disagreements regarding the dimensional structure of improvisation (Moorman & Miner, 1998a; Vera & Crossan, 2005; Hmieleski &

Corbett, 2006), 20 face-to-face interviews were conducted with sales practitioners based in Ghana (N= 10) and the United Kingdom (N = 10). These aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the construct and to clarify its nature and scope (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004).

The interviews also aimed to capture the construct in the words of sales personnel to increase respondents' understanding of the scale items. The interviews also explored other salesperson behaviours that were thought to be related to their improvisation. Table 5 presents a brief account of the type of information sought from respondents in these interviews. The interview findings aided the construct operationalization.

**Table 5 Information sought from respondents**

| Subsets |
| --- |
| **Main construct**<br><br>1. Salesperson improvisation<br>   • Salesperson creativity<br>   • Salesperson spontaneity |
| **Criterion variable**<br>1. Sales performance |
| **Drivers**<br>1. Salesperson self-efficacy<br>2. Salesperson experience<br>3. Salesperson autonomy |
| **Contingencies**<br>1. Resource availability<br>2. Pressure to perform<br>3. Individual agency |
| **Controls**<br>1. Compensation type<br>2. Industry type<br>3. Adaptive selling behaviour |

### 4.5.1.1 Salesperson self-efficacy

The measure for salesperson self-efficacy used in this study was adapted from Wang and Netemeyer (2002) who define it as "judgments about one's capability to organize and execute courses of action required to achieve designated levels of performance" (p. 220). The scale assessed respondents' confidence level in their capability to

perform their sales job-related tasks. It was measured with six items on a seven-point scale anchored on strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

### 4.5.1.2 Salesperson experience

Salesperson experience was indexed as the average of respondents' years in a sales role, the current firm, territory and industry. While the construct is commonly measured as respondents' years working as salespersons (e.g. Kohli et al., 1998), this study followed an alternative tradition to assess a wider scope of experience indices (Rapp et al., 2006 ). Consequently, salesperson experience was assessed using a four-item scale tapping number of years spent in sales, the firm, industry and territory.

### 4.5.1.3 Salesperson autonomy

Salesperson autonomy was conceived of as the extent to which salespersons perceive themselves to be allowed decision-making power by their superiors. Adapted from Wang and Netemeyer (2002), the autonomy scale asked respondents to indicate how much freedom they have in making decisions relative to the seven items in Table 6. Each item was anchored on a seven-point scale with one being 'not at all' and seven being 'to an extreme extent'.

### 4.5.1.4 Salesperson improvisation

As discussed, the initial literature search for measures of salesperson improvisation was unsuccessful. Secondly, the search found disagreements among improvisation scholars on the nature and scope of the construct. While earlier scholars conceptualised it as uni-dimensional (e.g. Moorman & Miner, 1998a), more recent work tend to perceive it as a multi-dimensional construct (Nemkova et al., 2015; Vera & Crossan, 2005).

Among proponents of the multi-dimensional view, there are also inconsistencies regarding the specific dimensions of improvisation. However, a close look at these conceptualizations shows an underlying agreement on creativity and spontaneity as cores to the construct. Accordingly, this study operationalized salesperson improvisation as comprising independent measures of salesperson creativity and salesperson spontaneity.

To measure the creativity dimension, the study drew from Wang and Netemeyer (2004) who define it as the use of new ideas in executing sales tasks. The creativity measure assessed the extent to which respondents employed novel and out-of-the-box ideas in unexpected and urgent sales situations. The initial measure in the questionnaire included seven items adapted from Vera and Crossan (2005) and Wang and Netemeyer (2004). Each item was anchored on a seven-point Likert scale with one being 'not at all' and seven being 'to an extreme extent'.

The spontaneity measure sought respondents to indicate the extent to which they acted on the spur of the moment in response to unexpected and urgent situations. It tapped the extent of their functional impulsivity and impromptu reactions to opportunities and challenges (Dickman, 1990). The initial measure comprised seven items based on adaptations from Vera and Crossan (2005) and Unger and Kernan (1983). Similar to the items tapping salesperson creativity, each item was anchored on a seven-point scale with one being 'not at all' and seven being 'to an extreme extent'.

**4.5.1.5 Resource availability**

Resource availability refers to salespersons' perception of the availability of relevant resources (tangible and intangible) for carrying out their job. Such resources include sales expenses, technical troubleshooting, product literature, demonstration equipment and pre- and post-sales service (Plouffe & Barclay, 2007). In spite of frequent references to resources as critical to the sales role, the construct of resource availability has failed to make it into the empirical literature. Accordingly, the measure used in this study was developed based on the conceptual writings of Bonney and Williams (2009), and Plouffe and Barclay (2007). The measure included five items tapping the salesperson's perception of the extent of availability of resources they consider critical for carrying out their job. They were anchored on a seven-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'

**4.5.1.6 Pressure to perform**

The questionnaire also assessed respondents' perception of pressure on them to improve their output. Pressure to perform refers to a felt sense of pressure from sources within the firm directed at the salesperson (Robertson & Rymon, 2001). Such pressure may manifest as the perception of unreasonably high targets, assignment of more tasks, and a feeling that failure to meet targets would lead to personal losses (e.g. dismissal or demotion) (Robertson & Rymon, 2001). Pressure to perform was assessed with a five item scale adapted from Gardner (2012) and, Robertson and Rymon (2001). The items were anchored on a seven-point Likert scale with one being 'strongly disagree' and seven being 'strongly agree'.

**4.5.1.7 Individual agency**

This variable captured the dispositional tendency of respondents to generate actions that contribute to the achievement of their personal targets. The measure assessed the extent to which respondents display a proclivity to be self-driven towards success, to persist in challenging situations until personally defined goals are met, and to engage in constant evaluation of the compatibility between their actions and personal targets. To date, no study has assessed agency among salespersons leading to an absence of an empirical measure of the construct. As such, a new scale was developed comprising seven items drawn from the conceptual writings of Bandura (2006; 2001; 1997). Each item was anchored on a seven point scale with one being 'strongly disagree' and seven being 'strongly agree'.

**4.5.1.8 Sales performance**

Within the salesforce management literature, sales performance is variously operationalised using objective measures (e.g. Ahearne et al., 2008), subjective measures (e.g. Miao & Evans, 2014) and combinations of the two (e.g. MacKenzie et al., 1993). However, as Rich et al (1999) have shown, both subjective and objective measures of salesperson performance are useful. They conclude that, in deciding which to choose, researchers should consider the trade-off between tapping the content domain of the construct and minimising error.

In this study, sales performance was assessed using subjective accounts of respondents' evaluation of their performance on given indices in the year preceding the study. The indices were: overall sales targets, sales of new products, increases in market share, sales of higher profit margin products, large volume sales, contributions to firm

growth and increases in share of business with major accounts. The indices were benchmarked against key criteria used for evaluating salespersons performance (Sujan et al., 1994).

This strategy is common in recent sales scholarship (see Miao & Evans, 2014; Theodosiou & Katsikea, 2007) and is recommended for comparing performance data of salespersons from different firms (Behrman & Perreault, 1982). Subjective measures of sales performance are also recommended for their ability to provide better coverage of the content domain of the performance construct (Rich et al., 1999). The initial measure comprised seven items adapted from Wang and Miao (2015) and anchored on a seven-point scale (1 = 'much lower than target'; 7 = 'much higher than target').

### 4.5.1.9 Industry type

This measure captured the industry that broadly describes the salesperson's firm. Thirteen industrial categories were adapted from the UK Standard Industry Classification (SIC) depending on their likelihood to have persons in designated sales roles (e.g. sales manager/executive, account manager, business development manager). A 14th open-ended 'other' category was included to allow for industrial classifications not explicitly captured. Respondents were asked to circle the industry that best describes their firm. Then, in keeping with previous work (Armstrong & Sweeney, 1994), the 14 groups were subsequently categorised into two major industry types namely service and production.

**4.5.1.10 Compensation type**

Compensation type was defined as the system by which salesperson remuneration is organised in a firm. In the sales literature, different compensation plans exist with variations across a spectrum of fixed salary versus incentive-based options (Basu et al., 1985). The compensation type measure asked respondents to indicate how their work is rewarded using an 11-point scale. Each point on the scale had corresponding commission and salary percentages.

As such, each point selected indicated the percentage of respondents' pay that comes in the form of salary and commissions (Slater & Olson, 2000). A high score on the upper axis indicates a higher margin of compensation in salary and a corresponding lower margin in commissions.

**4.5.1.11 Adaptive selling**

The scale for adaptive selling assessed the extent to which salespersons vary their selling behaviours across different sales situations. Six items, drawn from Spiro and Weitz (1990) and anchored on a seven-point scale (1 = 'not at all'; 7 = 'to an extreme extent') were included in the questionnaire as a measure of the adaptive behaviours of respondents. This was for control purposes.

**Table 6 Questionnaire scales**

| Anchors | Items | Source |
|---|---|---|
| *Salesperson self-efficacy* | *As a person…* | |
| **1= Strongly disagree**<br><br>**7= Strongly agree** | I feel confident in my ability to perform my job well | Wang & Netemeyer (2002) |
| | I feel that I am good at understanding customer needs | |
| | I am good at convincing other people | |
| | I feel very capable of dealing with the demands of the sales job | |
| | I feel I have the capabilities to successfully perform this job | |
| | I feel very capable of dealing effectively with job-related problems | |
| *Salesperson experience* | *Please indicate the following* | |
| | How many years of experience do you have in a sales job? | Rapp et al 2006 |
| | How many years of experience do you have in your current company? | |
| | How many years of experience do you have in your current territory? | |
| | How many years of experience do you have in the current industry? | |
| *Salesperson autonomy* | *In my work…* | |
| **1= Not at all**<br><br>**7= To an extreme extent** | I have freedom in choosing actions to satisfy customers | Wang & Netemeyer (2002) |
| | I am allowed freedom to select my own sales strategies | |
| | I have freedom to develop my own sales tactics | |
| | I am allowed freedom to select my own problem solving actions | |
| | I am free to develop appropriate actions towards meeting my personal targets | |
| | I am free to develop appropriate actions towards meeting my firm's goals | |
| | I have autonomy | |
| *Salesperson creativity* | *When dealing with unexpected and urgent situations…* | |
| **1= Not at all**<br><br>**7= To an extreme extent** | I experiment with new approaches in performing my job | Vera &Crossan (2005); |
| | I generate creative ideas | |
| | I think out of the box | Wang & Netemeyer (2004) |
| | I try to come up with fresh perspectives on old ways of doing things | |
| | I try new approaches to problems | |
| | I aim at originality in generating solutions | |
| | I am inventive in overcoming barriers | |

**Table 6 Questionnaire scales (continued)**

| Anchors | Items | Source |
|---|---|---|
| **Salesperson spontaneity** | ***When dealing with unexpected and urgent situations…*** | |
| **1= Not at all** | I respond in the moment | Vera & Crossan |
| | I deal with it on the spot | (2005); |
| **7= To an extreme extent** | I act spontaneously | |
| | I respond impulsively | Unger & Kernan (1983) |
| | My response to the situation tends to be held back by details | |
| | I act 'on-the-spur-of-the-moment' | |
| | I try to be reactive to the situation | |
| *Sales performance* | ***Please indicate whether your previous year's performance on the following met your expectations*** | |
| **1=Much lower than target** | **My performance in…** | Wang & Miao (2015); |
| | Meeting the sales targets assigned to me | |
| **7=Much higher than target** | Generating sales of new company products | |
| | Increasing market share for my company | |
| | Selling products with higher profit margins | |
| | Selling to large volume customers in my territory | |
| | Making significant contribution to my firm's growth | |
| | Expanding share of business with major accounts | |
| *Resource Availability* | ***In my work…*** | |
| **1= Strongly disagree** | I have enough resources | Bonney & Williams (2009) |
| | I have enough resources to be able to see my ideas through to fruition | |
| **7= Strongly agree** | I have access to a wide variety of resources for meeting customers' needs | Plouffe & Barclay |
| | I have a lot of freedom in applying the firm's resources to satisfy customers | (2007) |
| | I feel confident in my firm's ability to provide me the resources I need to work | |
| *Pressure to perform* | ***In my work…*** | |
| **1= Strongly disagree** | I am under a lot of pressure | Based on the conceptual writings of: |
| | I face a lot of pressure to meet high sales targets | Gardner (2012); |
| **7= Strongly agree** | If my sales targets were not met, I would be called to explain why | |
| | I may lose my job if I consistently fail to meet targets | Robertson & Rymon (2001) |
| | The attention of my boss is always on me | |

**Table 6 Questionnaire scales (continued)**

| Anchors | Items | Source |
|---|---|---|
| *Individual Agency* | *As a person…* | |
| **1= Strongly disagree** | I am very proactive in how I do my work | Newly developed scale based on the conceptual writings of Albert Bandura (See Bandura 2001, 1999, 1991) |
| | I tend to motivate myself to work towards my goals | |
| **7= Strongly agree** | I actively keep myself on track to complete my plans | |
| | When completing tasks, I monitor my behaviour against my personal standards | |
| | I am conscious of my actions because they define my personal identity | |
| | When completing tasks I am conscious of what I can and cannot handle | |
| | When completing tasks, I tend to evaluate the effectiveness of my choices | |
| *Adaptive selling behaviour* | *In my work…* | |
| **1= Not at all** | I tend to treat each customer as unique | Spiro & Weitz (1990) |
| | When I feel that my sales approach is not working, I change to another approach | |
| **7= To an extreme extent** | I like to experiment with different sales approaches | |
| | I am very flexible in the selling approach I use | |
| | I can easily use a wide variety of selling approaches | |
| | I am very sensitive to the needs of my customers | |
| | | |
| *Compensation Type* | *Please select ONE to indicate the percentage of your pay in salary/commissions* | |
| | % Salary<br>100%  90  80  70  60  50  40  30  20  10   0%<br> x      x   x   x   x   x   x   x   x   x    x<br>0%    10  20  30  40  50  60  70  80  90  100<br>% Commission: | Slater & Olson (2000) |
| *Industry Type* | *Please choose ONE industry which mainly describes your firm* | |
| | 1. Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing    8. Transportation & Storage | UK    Standard    Industry classification (2007); |
| | 2. Mining & Quarrying    9. Accommodation & Food Services | |
| | 3. Manufacturing    10. Information & Communication | Armstrong & Sweeney (1994) |
| | 4. Electricity, Gas & Air Conditioning    11.Financial & Insurance | |
| | 5.Water, Sewerage & Waste  Management    12.Real Estate activities | |
| | 6. Wholesale &Retail    13. Professional, Scientific &Technical activities | |
| | 7. Construction    14. Other | |

## 4.6 Question wording

In designing the research instrument, careful consideration was given to language clarity. This is because, in self-administered questionnaires, language has direct implications for how well respondents complete surveys (Christian & Dillman, 2004). Accordingly, the choice of the English language was made with consideration of the target sample's language proficiency in it. English is the official language in Ghana serving as the means classroom instruction and official communication (Gyasi, 1990; Owu-Ewie, 2006). This being the case, the questionnaire was developed in English as it was thought that respondents would be adequately proficient in it. This conviction was confirmed during the pilot phase of the study which proved that respondents could read and understand the questions with ease.

Further, to ensure that respondents shared the researcher's understanding of the main construct, salesperson improvisation, instructions at the beginning of the questionnaire defined it for respondents. In addition, each thematic set of questions was introduced with clear instructions on how to approach the questions: for instance by casting their minds to specific or general selling situations; or answering the questions as they relate to them as individuals etc.

This strategy ensured that ambiguities about questions and the expectations of respondents were removed (Hultman, 2008). Lastly, following scholarly recommendations, questions were constructed with careful consideration to avoid generalizations, double-barrelled questions and leading questions (Churchill, 1979).

**4.7 Question sequencing**

Research methodology scholars recommend arranging question sets in logical order and around thematic topics (Malhotra, 2006). Two main options exist for question sequencing: the funnel approach and the inverted funnel approach. In the former, the questionnaire begins with an opening section where the researcher introduces the study, attempts to gain the trust and cooperation of the respondent while also establishing the legitimacy of the study.

This is followed by questions that relate directly to the research problem and are considered non-personal and non-threatening to respondents. The questionnaire then moves to more specific questions that may relate to demographics and classificatory information such as income or performance outputs. In the inverted funnel approach, the reverse of the above description applies.

In either case, it is also recommended that thematic sets of questions are introduced with brief sentences to help respondents switch their train of thought. The researcher followed these recommendations. In applying the funnel approach, the questionnaire begun with an introductory note from the researcher in which the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, expectations of respondents and benefits were explained.

This was followed by questions relating to the research problem, starting from the general to classificatory demographic information, in that order. In addition, each thematic set of questions were introduced with a brief description. For instance, in section 'C' which asked questions about predispositions, the introduction read: "this

section seeks information about your predispositions. You do not need to restrict yourself to any particular type of selling situation".

## 4.8 Response format

The main response format adopted in the design of this question is close ended answer format. Even though a host of other answer formats exist that could have been applied (e.g. open-ended and multiple choice) this option was best suited. It is respondent-friendly as it does not exhaust them with writing out responses. It also prevents misinterpretation of questions. Also close-ended questions are relatively better suited for quantitative analysis as it enables easy comparison of responses across many different respondents.

Thus, for most questions, respondents were given a number of options from which to select a choice that applied to them. However, care was taken to break the monotony of close-ended questions through the use of different anchor formats. In addition, a few of the questions were open-ended to capture responses that could not be adequately covered with close-ended questions. Such questions included those on working experience. The questions were mainly measured on an interval or ratio scale (Churchill, 2005) as most of the constructs are continuous in nature (Hair et al., 2006).

## 4.9 Questionnaire pre-test

Before conducting the actual survey, the research instrument was subjected to rigorous testing to assure that it was clear and also adequately covered relevant constructs. First, the researcher sought to establish whether the question items and instructions were clear. The exercise also sought to assess the face validity of the construct measures. Face validity,  the extent to which a given set of scale items provide adequate

coverage of the theoretical domain of a construct (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), is a critical first step in the researcher's effort to assure data quality.

It is a way of ensuring that 'on the face of it' scale items display some sort of natural relationship to their underlying factor. To establish the face validity of the study's scales, the researcher followed Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) recommendations that initial scale items be subjected to expert review. Accordingly, two groups of experts were consulted with an initial draft of the research instrument.

First, marketing scholars who are well versed in questionnaire design were presented with copies of the draft questionnaire to assess. In particular, two associate professors from the Marketing Division of the Leeds University Business School, a professor of Marketing at Loughborough University and an associate professor of strategy and marketing at the American College of Greece kindly provided initial feedback that led to significant improvements.

Following the improvements made with their suggestions, the draft questionnaire was further subjected to practitioner scrutiny. A total of 41 sales practitioners based in Ghana (N = 21) and the UK (N = 20) were interviewed to assess the readability of the questionnaire. In the case of Ghana, half of the interviewees also participated in earlier interviews that aided construct operationalization. During this second round of interviews, respondents completed the survey before being interviewed on their experiences relative to clarity (see Appendix 4A for the pre-test questionnaire).

The main issue was the survey length. In a few cases, respondents suggested a rewording of some items. The questionnaire was accordingly revised to remove

overlaps, spelling errors and double-barrelled questions. It must, however, be noted that, although the length of the survey was a big issue and, therefore, likely to negatively affect the response rate, it was thought that any revisions in that regard could compromise data quality (see Appendix 4B for the final research instrument and Appendix 4C for the study's ethical approval from the University of Leeds).

## 4.10 Sampling frame and sample selection

The unit of analysis of this study is individual industrial salespersons. The study chose this unit of analysis based on characteristics of the industrial sales job which make it more suited to a study on improvisation. The logic is that industrial salespersons, as opposed to consumer goods salespersons, may find improvisation particularly important given the non-routine nature of the selling process (Cron, 1984). Industrial salespersons sell products which are often complex and require tailored configurations to suit the needs of industrial clients (Bonney & Williams, 2009).

The study defines salesperson broadly to include all persons, within firms, whose duties are client facing with the aim of (1) generating new sales or (2) maintaining and expanding existing sales accounts. Thus, the sample description includes sales managers/executives, account managers, business development managers and sales directors. This sampling strategy of using industrial salespersons as units of analysis is well accepted in the sales literature (e.g. Miao & Evans, 2014; Piercy et al., 2006; Shannahan et al., 2013).

Given that the study was empirically set in Ghana, the sampling frame included all industrial salespersons there. However, for practical reasons relating to resource and time constraints, a census of the entire population was impossible. Consequently, to

generate a representative sample, the researcher relied on the 2012 Ghana Business Directory and Association of Ghana Industries databases (Acquaah, 2012). A total of 4,125 industrial organizations listed in the two databases that were five years or older, had at least five employees were identified. To balance survey administration costs and effective sample size required for statistical power, data collection was limited to four commercial cities (i.e., Accra, Tema, Takoradi and Kumasi). This strategy was based on Grant's (2001) assertion of the concentration of Ghana's commercial activities in few cities. Out of the 4,125 firms identified, a random sample of 1,472 was selected using the random number generation tool in SPSS 16.0.

Subsequently, letters were sent to the divisional heads (sometimes the CEO or MD) of these firms requesting them to introduce the study to their salespersons. The researcher received consent from 652 divisional heads who agreed to introduce the study to their respective sales personnel. For the most part, each firm contacted had only one person in a sales position. Citing reasons such as busy schedules and lack of interest, some of the salespersons introduced to the study declined participation. The final sample consisted of 400 salespersons working in 388 firms who agreed to complete the questionnaire (in a few cases, two salespersons from the same firm participated). The researcher, together with a trained assistant, administered structured questionnaires, in person, to this sample. A total of 224 completed surveys were received, yielding a 56% response rate.

## 4.11 Response rate enhancement

As noted, a major issue highlighted during the pilot study concerned the questionnaire length. However, considering that few options existed for reducing it without compromising constructs' domain coverage, steps were taken to enhance the response

rate. Methodology scholars recommend that sponsoring institutions should be highlighted in the questionnaire to boost credibility. They also recommend that the researcher's position and affiliation should be highlighted in the cover letter (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 1996).

In this regard, the printed questionnaire had the University of Leeds Logo prominently embossed on the cover with a declaration that the research was fully sponsored by the university. The researcher's name, position and contact details as well as the contact and names of all three supervisors were included in the cover letter.

A second strategy that has been found to significantly affect response rates is the emphasis on the social utility of the research project (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 1996). Accordingly, the cover letter also highlighted the value of the study for improving sales practice. Thirdly, Bruvold, Comer, and Rospert (1990) also suggest the use of rewards for boosting response rates. As such, each respondent was promised an executive summary of the findings. Last, but not least, respondents were given the assurance of a strict adherence to confidentiality in the use of their responses according to University of Leeds guidelines.

## 4.12 Survey administration

Common survey administration methods include mail, telephone, personal interviews and, with increasing prominence, online surveys (McDonald & Adam, 2003). Justifiably, the continued adoption of each of these data collection methods is evidence of their viability in some respects, and challenges in others. While on the one hand, their respective advantages ensure their continued use, on the other, their disadvantages account for the adoption of competing methods.

The method of questionnaire administration in this study was a face-to-face drop-off where respondents were personally handed the survey for them to complete at their convenience (within an agreed time of two weeks). Relative to this method, postal and online administration methods are cheaper (Lefever, Dal, & Matthíasdóttir, 2007). However, practical reasons prevented their use in this study. Postal surveys suffer from slow response pace (McDonald & Adam, 2003), a consideration that is critical in the particular context industrial selling. Industrial salespersons are often field-based and, therefore, more likely to spend time away from their offices making them prone to delayed postal survey responses.

Conditions in Ghana at the time of data collection also prevented online survey administration from being used.  Low internet penetration levels (14%) (World Bank, 2013), coupled with a national power crisis at the time of data collection meant respondents lacked reliable electricity and internet supply to complete an online survey. In view of these factors, the researcher adopted a face-to-face method of questionnaire delivery to respondents.

Before delivering questionnaires to them, the researcher had, through their divisional heads, introduced the study to the sample members (see section 4.10). Upon receiving their participation consent, the researcher and a trained assistant visited each respondent to personally drop off the research instrument. To ensure reliable responses and avoid researcher biases, the research assistant was trained extensively to enable him desist from prompting informants and be able to provide clarifications that respondents may need. He was also trained on the study objectives, the importance of assuring respondents of confidentiality and encouraging respondent honesty and full

questionnaire completion. Informants were motivated by a promise of complete confidentiality and the opportunity to receive a summary of the research findings.

After handing over questionnaires to respondents, they were left to complete surveys at their convenience. Sixteen of the informants chose to have the questionnaire delivered to them via email which they subsequently completed, printed and returned to the data collection team. After the first two weeks of each administration, the team called respondents to remind them and to collect completed surveys. This was repeated, interspersed with visits to the respondents until completed surveys were received. This process took a total of six months, at the end of which 224 surveys (including online N=16) were returned fully completed, yielding an overall response rate of 56%.

Respondents were subjected to a *post hoc* suitability test using a set of three questions included in the questionnaire. The questions asked respondents to indicate on a seven point scale (a) the amount of their direct client interactions, (b) the amount of selling they did as part of their job and (c) their knowledge about the sales role. Kumar, Stern, and Anderson (1993) recommend the exclusion of all questionnaires with a rating lower than four on any of these questions. The researcher excluded six surveys using this criteria. The mean composite rating after the deletion was 6.05 indicating confidence in respondent quality. Accordingly, the study sample comprises 218 respondents. A detailed description of the respondents' characteristics is provided in the next chapter.

## 4.13 Data Analysis Techniques

The study applied various descriptive analytical techniques to (a) transform the data for statistical testing and (b) to examine the characteristics of the data itself. First, the researcher used descriptive analyses to assess missing data, data normality and the incidence of outliers. Chapter 5 presents a detailed account of these procedures and the findings. Following Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the researcher initially assessed construct scales through both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis procedures.

Widely accepted criteria were used to determine the extent of fit between the conceptual model and the data. These are Comparative Fit Index, Normed Fit Index/Non Normed Fit Index, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, and the Chi-square statistic (Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Considering that the study explored various interrelations between constructs, the researcher followed Hair et al. (2006) to select a multivariate analytical procedure as best suited to the study. In particular, the study adopted the Seemingly Unrelated Regressions (SUR) technique for statistical analysis.

## 4.14 Chapter summary

The chapter has presented the strategic and tactical methodological choices made in this study. Issues covered include the ontological and epistemological basis of the study and how these inform the implementation of the quantitative research methodology. In addition, tactical issues of sampling, instrument development, survey implementation and data analysis were discussed.

# CHAPTER 5

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### 5.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the results of the descriptive and statistical analysis. It begins with a description of the sample characteristics followed by measure selection and purification processes. The chapter also presents a detailed description of the procedures used in hypotheses testing and the resulting findings.

### 5.2 Profile of the study sample

The study sample consists of 218 industrial sales professionals in Ghana. Because the individual salesperson is the unit of analysis, the concern in sampling was individual rather than firm characteristics such as size or output. The basic criteria for inclusion was that respondents be working in a client-facing selling capacity in industrial firms. As such, all respondents work in sales roles. As shown in Table 7, the majority of the respondents are male who sell intangible products (services) mainly to domestic clients. The average experience among respondents is 4.5.

**Table 7 Respondent characteristics**

| Variable | Frequency | | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | | |
| Female | 46 | | 21 |
| Male | 172 | | 79 |
| **Type of product sold** | | | |
| Tangible products | 88 | | 40.4 |
| Intangible products | 130 | | 59.6 |
| **Context of customer base** | | | |
| Domestic | 139 | | 63.8 |
| Export | 79 | | 36.2 |
| **Respondent experience** | **Minimum** | **Maximum** | **Mean** | **SD** |
| | 1.00 | 28.38 | 4.54 | 2.71 |

**5.3 Missing Value Analysis**

A key issue in the use of multivariate analysis techniques is the assurance of data appropriateness. According to Hair et al. (2013), before testing any relationship between variables, data examination is critical to ensure that missing data is neither too prevalent nor occurring non randomly. Owing to concerns during the pilot study regarding questionnaire length, the possibility of incomplete surveys was expected. As such, to assure that this did not pose a challenge to the study's findings, missing value analysis (MVA) was conducted.

The initial step was to examine missing data according to observations. Hair et al recommend that cases with more than 10% missing data may be considered for deletion if doing so would not adversely affect sample size. However, in this case, such deletions were unnecessary as none of the respondents had left out any substantial volumes of questions unanswered. Next, variables were examined to determine the extent of missing data.

To do this, expectation maximization (EM) algorithm (with SPSS 16.0) (Little & Schenker, 1995) was used. Results showed that missing data did not pose a big challenge in this instance. Of the variables in the model, the one with highest incidence of missing data was Industry Type which recorded 2.7% missing data, a score markedly below the 15% rule of thumb suggested by Hair et al. (2013). This gave assurance that missing data did not pose any problems to the study.

## 5.4 Response bias

To assess possible confounds from respondents' characteristics, the researcher followed Etter and Perneger (1997) and Armstrong and Overton (1977) to check for non-response bias. Mean responses on sales performance were compared across early respondents (those who completed the questionnaire on the agreed two week timeline) and late respondents (those who rearranged more time). Using t-test, the researcher found no significant differences across the two groups, giving the assurance that the data does not suffer from a non-response bias.

## 5.5 Measure assessment and purification

Owing to the multiple variables used in multivariate analysis, it is conventional for researchers to adopt data reduction strategies. This aims to draw out factor patterns before proceeding to hypotheses testing (Hair et al., 2013). One of such techniques is Factor Analysis which aims to define underlying structures among variables (Hair et al., 2013), enabling the discovery of coherent subsets. Variables highly correlated with each other are assumed to belong to the same factor. In this study, the researcher used two data reduction techniques in selecting and purifying scales.

### 5.5.1 Item selection through exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Initial item selection procedures mainly involved the use of EFA. Since this initial exploration aimed to examine underlying factors, the approach taken was to 'take what the data brings up'. The number of factors to be extracted was estimated freely (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The model comprised all 61 indicants of the ten multi-item constructs in the model. The factors are salesperson self-efficacy (EFFI), salesperson experience (EXPER), salesperson autonomy (AUTON), salesperson creativity (CREAT), salesperson spontaneity (SPONT), resource availability (RES),

pressure to perform (PRESS), individual agency (AGEN), sales performance (PERF) and adaptive selling behaviour (ADAPT).

In estimating the initial factor solutions, the researcher used the principal axis factoring method of factor extraction. This was accompanied by the direct oblimin rotation. Criteria for item selection followed Hair et al's (2013) recommendation that for sample sizes between 200 and 250, factor loadings should not be lower than 0.40. Accordingly, items loading less than 0.40 on their underlying factors were considered for excluded from further analysis. As Table 8 shows, the initial EFA returned a 12 factor model (instead of the expected ten factor model). Overall, these 12 factors extracted explained 66% of the cumulative variance in the model.

**Table 8 Initial EFA solution**

| Items | Factor loadings | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CREAT | AGEN | PERF | SPONT | RES | EXPER | PRESS | ADAPT | PRESS4[*] | AUTON | EFFI | ADAPT2[*] |
| EFFI1 | .03 | .24 | .09 | -.02 | .00 | .00 | .06 | -.00 | -.13 | .01 | **.61** | .01 |
| EFFI2 | -.02 | .20 | .04 | .00 | -.12 | -.05 | .19 | .03 | -.33 | .08 | **.60** | .07 |
| EFFI3 | .09 | .06 | .12 | -.03 | -.24 | -.06 | .24 | -.10 | -.30 | -.02 | .32[a] | .06 |
| EFFI4 | .08 | .09 | .10 | .04 | .04 | .05 | -.06 | -.19 | .02 | -.01 | **.65** | -.10 |
| EFFI5 | .00 | .11 | .05 | .03 | .11 | .03 | -.06 | -.09 | .06 | .08 | **.75** | -.15 |
| EFFI6 | -.01 | .01 | -.02 | .06 | .05 | .04 | -.14 | -.06 | .37 | .05 | **.70** | .24 |
| EXPER1 | .06 | .00 | .10 | .05 | -.02 | **.78** | .00 | .04 | .07 | .01 | .11 | .04 |
| EXPER2 | -.07 | -.02 | -.01 | -.12 | .02 | **.69** | -.02 | -.04 | -.08 | .05 | -.14 | .01 |
| EXPER3 | .03 | .03 | -.06 | .02 | .07 | **.87** | -.01 | .03 | -.05 | .05 | .00 | -.00 |
| EXPER4 | .01 | .03 | .04 | .11 | -.05 | **.85** | .10 | .07 | .10 | -.08 | .08 | -.07 |
| AUTON1 | -.02 | -.00 | .20 | .02 | -.34 | .06 | -.01 | .03 | -.29 | **.46** | -.10 | .05 |
| AUTON2 | .13 | -.05 | -.03 | .02 | -.12 | -.00 | .08 | .01 | -.07 | **.75** | -.02 | .04 |
| AUTON3 | .20 | -.02 | -.01 | -.04 | .04 | -.03 | .02 | -.08 | -.14 | **.69** | .15 | -.16 |
| AUTON4 | -.04 | .01 | .03 | -.04 | -.06 | .03 | -.05 | -.02 | .09 | **.77** | .01 | .07 |
| AUTON5 | -.06 | .12 | .02 | .01 | .02 | .06 | .07 | -.08 | .14 | **.72** | .05 | -.03 |
| AUTON6 | .08 | .02 | -.12 | -.00 | -.13 | .05 | -.09 | -.07 | .05 | **.57** | .02 | .13 |
| AUTON7 | -.05 | -.13 | .17 | -.24 | -.16 | .09 | -.08 | -.11 | -.12 | **.48** | -.10 | .18 |
| CREAT1 | .38 | -.05 | .08 | -.41 | -.12 | -.13 | -.07 | .00 | -.15 | -.01 | .00 | .18 |
| CREAT2 | **.53** | -.00 | .05 | -.07 | -.02 | .01 | .14 | .04 | -.07 | .13 | .03 | .31 |
| CREAT3 | **.65** | .08 | -.05 | .00 | .01 | .05 | .17 | -.05 | -.20 | -.01 | -.02 | .07 |

**Table 8 Initial EFA solution (continued)**

| Items | Factor loadings | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CREAT | AGEN | PERF | SPONT | RES | EXPER | PRESS | ADAPT | PRESS4* | AUTON | EFFI | ADAPT2* |
| CREAT4 | **.53** | -.07 | -.08 | -.11 | -.05 | .07 | -.05 | -.23 | -.05 | -.02 | .06 | -.10 |
| CREAT5 | **.65** | .03 | .02 | -.13 | -.07 | -.10 | -.12 | .02 | .08 | .05 | .06 | -.03 |
| CREAT6 | **.64** | .13 | -.03 | -.13 | -.09 | .04 | -.08 | -.02 | .16 | .08 | -.03 | -.22 |
| CREAT7 | **.62** | .19 | -.00 | .03 | .09 | .00 | -.01 | -.01 | .21 | .14 | .00 | .13 |
| SPONT1 | .07 | -.11 | -.00 | **-.76** | -.04 | .03 | .12 | .01 | .00 | .07 | .06 | -.07 |
| SPONT2 | .07 | -.09 | .00 | **-.77** | .02 | -.03 | .12 | .05 | .06 | .03 | .08 | -.04 |
| SPONT3 | .00 | -.00 | .05 | **-.78** | -.04 | -.08 | -.03 | -.04 | .03 | .04 | .05 | -.02 |
| SPONT4 | .00 | -.10 | .06 | **-.73** | -.08 | -.03 | .05 | -.02 | -.04 | -.07 | -.00 | .15 |
| SPONT5 | .02 | .03 | .06 | **-.51** | -.10 | .03 | -.11 | -.05 | -.23 | .01 | -.08 | .00 |
| SPONT6 | .13 | .05 | -.04 | **-.80** | .00 | .09 | -.03 | -.05 | -.03 | -.05 | -.04 | -.13 |
| SPONT7 | -.05 | .16 | .02 | **-.75** | .10 | -.07 | .02 | .02 | .11 | .02 | -.13 | .10 |
| RES1 | -.08 | -.03 | .01 | -.07 | **-.84** | -.06 | .09 | -.05 | -.02 | .12 | .01 | -.12 |
| RES2 | .03 | .01 | .04 | -.07 | **-.87** | -.04 | .05 | -.01 | -.02 | -.0 | -.00 | -.02 |
| RES3 | .08 | -.00 | .03 | -.01 | **-.90** | -.01 | .00 | -.02 | -.04 | .02 | .02 | -.08 |
| RES4 | .00 | .00 | .02 | -.03 | **-.76** | -.02 | .01 | .03 | -.02 | .16 | -.05 | .13 |
| RES5 | .05 | .08 | -.01 | .08 | **-.85** | .08 | -.02 | -.01 | .19 | .01 | -.04 | .09 |
| PRESS1 | -.01 | -.08 | -.11 | -.07 | -.12 | .10 | **.65** | -.08 | -.12 | -.13 | .01 | .17 |
| PRESS2 | -.13 | .04 | -.01 | -.15 | -.18 | .01 | **.57** | -.14 | -.02 | .02 | .05 | -.06 |
| PRESS3 | .07 | .08 | .08 | -.02 | .05 | -.03 | **.85** | .04 | .24 | .10 | -.08 | -.01 |
| PRESS4 | .08 | .07 | .08 | .11 | .14 | -.02 | .18 | -.11 | **.49** | .09 | .05 | -.08 |
| PRESS5 | -.04 | .06 | .04 | -.02 | -.20 | .07 | .14[a] | -.16 | .35 | -.10 | .18 | .08 |

**Table 8 Initial EFA solution (continued)**

| Items | Factor loadings | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|------|------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|------|---------|
|       | CREAT | AGEN | PERF | SPONT | RES | EXPER | PRESS | ADAPT | PRESS4[*] | AUTON | EFFI | ADAPT2[*] |
| AGEN1 | .02 | **.63** | -.00 | -.03 | .17 | -.01 | .13 | .02 | .02 | .22 | .15 | -.16 |
| AGEN2 | .03 | **.57** | .02 | .06 | -.19 | -.07 | .27 | -.01 | -.04 | -.05 | .01 | .03 |
| AGEN3 | .12 | **.69** | .03 | -.01 | .11 | .02 | .01 | -.03 | .04 | .04 | .07 | -.03 |
| AGEN4 | .07 | **.68** | .08 | -.07 | -.10 | -.03 | -.04 | -.15 | -.00 | -.07 | -.07 | .03 |
| AGEN5 | .04 | **.78** | .00 | .06 | -.05 | .08 | -.07 | -.02 | -.00 | -.02 | .08 | .02 |
| AGEN6 | -.04 | **.73** | -.10 | -.04 | .06 | .08 | .02 | -.03 | -.02 | .02 | .12 | -.02 |
| AGEN7 | -.01 | **.80** | -.04 | .05 | -.06 | .00 | -.08 | .01 | .01 | .00 | .05 | .07 |
| PERF1 | -.08 | .06 | **.65** | -.04 | .03 | .05 | -.16 | .00 | -.02 | .04 | .06 | -.03 |
| PERF2 | .06 | .04 | **.63** | -.07 | -.12 | .00 | -.13 | -.01 | -.10 | -.00 | .10 | -.02 |
| PERF3 | -.06 | -.02 | **.85** | -.00 | .03 | -.02 | -.01 | -.03 | -.08 | -.01 | -.01 | -.01 |
| PERF4 | .00 | -.07 | **.81** | .04 | -.03 | .05 | .13 | -.11 | -.08 | -.05 | -.11 | -.09 |
| PERF5 | .06 | -.05 | **.89** | .00 | -.02 | -.01 | .04 | -.00 | -.00 | -.08 | .02 | -.04 |
| PERF6 | -.08 | .07 | **.66** | -.09 | .05 | -.00 | .07 | .05 | .27 | .10 | .08 | .07 |
| PERF7 | .04 | -.00 | **.77** | .01 | -.04 | -.01 | .03 | .09 | .24 | .06 | .03 | .20 |
| ADAPT1 | .15 | .03 | .11 | .02 | .06 | .02 | .06 | -.26[a] | -.33 | .23 | .03 | .33 |
| ADAPT2 | .05 | .06 | -.06 | -.02 | -.02 | -.01 | .10 | -.31 | -.01 | .17 | .01 | **.56** |
| ADAPT3 | -.05 | .00 | .00 | -.15 | -.07 | -.05 | .12 | **-.64** | .00 | .19 | -.09 | .09 |
| ADAPT4 | -.05 | .01 | .02 | .01 | -.01 | -.02 | -.03 | **-.88** | .08 | .02 | .05 | .02 |
| ADAPT5 | .13 | .02 | .01 | .03 | .01 | -.04 | -.00 | **-.82** | .05 | .02 | .08 | -.01 |
| ADAPT6 | .06 | .36 | .06 | .08 | .03 | .04 | .01 | **-.51** | -.05 | -.02 | .10 | -.01 |

*KMO: 0.83; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity : 10699.30 (sig. 0.00); Percentage of variance explained: 66%; [*]Items creating surplus factors; [a] Cross-loading items*

Besides the ten factors expected to be extracted, the second indicant of adaptive selling behaviour (ADAPT2) created a surplus factor. In addition, the fourth indicant of pressure to perform (PRESS4) created a surplus factor. These suggest that the items in question do not share any properties with their expected underlying factors.

They were, therefore, excluded from further measure analysis. In addition, three items (ADAPT1, EFFI3, PRES5) returned loadings below the set criteria of .40 while the first item of salesperson creativity (CREAT1) cross-loaded significantly on salesperson spontaneity. Consequently, these items were also excluded from further analysis.

Subsequently, the researcher estimated a second EFA solution comprising 55 items. The same methods of extraction and rotation were adopted in estimating this second EFA solution. Again, contrary to expectation, this factor model returned an 11 factor solution rather than the expected ten factor solution. The 11th factor was created by the sixth indicant of salesperson self- efficacy (EFFI6) with a loading of 0.41. The same item also loaded significantly (0.60) on the expected underlying factor (salesperson self-efficacy).

Given that its loading on the underlying self-efficacy factor was higher than that on the surplus factor suggesting its stronger relation to the former, the researcher retained it for further scale purification. Table 9 presents details of the items that loaded significantly (0.40) on the various factors. These were selected for further purification in the confirmatory factor analysis.

**Table 9 Final EFA solution**

| Items | Factor loadings | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SPONT | AGEN | PERF | EXPE | ADAPT | CREAT | AUTON | EFFI | RES | PRES | EFFI6[*] |
| CREAT2 | | | | | | .54 | | | | | |
| CREAT3 | | | | | | .69 | | | | | |
| CREAT4 | | | | | | .50 | | | | | |
| CREAT5 | | | | | | .67 | | | | | |
| CREAT6 | | | | | | .59 | | | | | |
| CREAT7 | | | | | | .64 | | | | | |
| SPONT1 | -.77 | | | | | | | | | | |
| SPONT2 | -.79 | | | | | | | | | | |
| SPONT3 | -.78 | | | | | | | | | | |
| SPONT4 | -.68 | | | | | | | | | | |
| SPONT5 | -.51 | | | | | | | | | | |
| SPONT6 | -.82 | | | | | | | | | | |
| SPONT7 | -.71 | | | | | | | | | | |
| ADAPT3 | | | | | -.62 | | | | | | |
| ADAPT4 | | | | | -.90 | | | | | | |
| ADAPT5 | | | | | -.85 | | | | | | |
| ADAPT6 | | | | | -.50 | | | | | | |
| AGEN1 | | .63 | | | | | | | | | |
| AGEN2 | | .57 | | | | | | | | | |

**Table 9 Final EFA solution (continued)**

| Items | Factor loadings | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SPONT | AGEN | PERF | EXPE | ADAPT | CREAT | AUTON | EFFI | RES | PRES | EFFI6* |
| AGEN3 | | .69 | | | | | | | | | |
| AGEN4 | | .68 | | | | | | | | | |
| AGEN5 | | .76 | | | | | | | | | |
| AGEN6 | | .72 | | | | | | | | | |
| AGEN7 | | .79 | | | | | | | | | |
| PERF1 | | | .65 | | | | | | | | |
| PERF2 | | | .63 | | | | | | | | |
| PERF3 | | | .84 | | | | | | | | |
| PERF4 | | | .79 | | | | | | | | |
| PERF5 | | | .88 | | | | | | | | |
| PERF6 | | | .69 | | | | | | | | |
| PERF7 | | | .80 | | | | | | | | |
| EXPER1 | | | | .78 | | | | | | | |
| EXPER2 | | | | .68 | | | | | | | |
| EXPER3 | | | | .86 | | | | | | | |
| EXPER4 | | | | .86 | | | | | | | |
| AUTON1 | | | | | | | -.50 | | | | |
| AUTON2 | | | | | | | -.77 | | | | |
| AUTON3 | | | | | | | -.65 | | | | |
| AUTON4 | | | | | | | -.79 | | | | |

**Table 9 Final EFA solution (continued)**

| Items | Factor loadings | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SPONT | AGEN | PERF | EXPE | ADAPT | CREAT | AUTON | EFFI | RES | PRES | EFFI6[*] |
| AUTON5 | | | | | | | -.69 | | | | |
| AUTON6 | | | | | | | -.61 | | | | |
| AUTON7 | | | | | | | -.55 | | | | |
| EFFI1 | | | | | | | | .60 | | | |
| EFFI2 | | | | | | | | .61 | | | |
| EFFI4 | | | | | | | | .65 | | | |
| EFFI5 | | | | | | | | .78 | | | |
| EFFI6 | | | | | | | | **.60** | | | **.41** |
| RES1 | | | | | | | | | -.83 | | |
| RES2 | | | | | | | | | -.88 | | |
| RES3 | | | | | | | | | -.90 | | |
| RES4 | | | | | | | | | -.76 | | |
| RES5 | | | | | | | | | -.85 | | |
| PRESS1 | | | | | | | | | | .70 | |
| PRESS2 | | | | | | | | | | .55 | |
| PRESS3 | | | | | | | | | | .81 | |
| *KMO: 828; Bartlett's Test: 9651.12 (sig. 0.00); Percentage of variance explained: 66%; [*] Cross-loading item* | | | | | | | | | | | |

Following the exploratory analysis, the researcher proceeded to examine the various factors extracted for their measurement properties. This was to establish whether beyond the initial factor analysis, the items constituting these factors fit the criteria for further analysis in a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Because the CFA makes *apriori* assumptions on the number of factors to extract, it requires assurance of item quality and a theoretical basis for including them. Consequently, correlations between items, and with their underlying factors were examined to see if they met the 0.30 and 0.50 critical values respectively (Hair et al., 2013). To determine the extent to which sets of scale items reliably represented their underlying factors, criteria for reliability was set at a coefficient (Cronbach) alpha of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2013).

As shown in Table 10, an examination of the reliability coefficients of all the scales returned alpha values well above the 0.70 cut off point. This was taken as an indication of construct reliability across the scales. In addition, the data showed high correlations among items of each scale. Specifically, the salesperson creativity indicants recorded acceptable inter-item correlations ranging between 0.36 and 0.57. A similar pattern was observed with the salesperson spontaneity (between 0.43 and 0.76) and individual agency scales (between 0.46 and 0.71).

Sales performance and salesperson experience also returned scores that indicated high internal consistency. The sales performance indicators displayed reasonably high shared correlations ranging between 0.50 and 0.59 while indicators of salesperson experience ranged between 0.46 and 0.78 respectively. In addition, the scale for adaptive selling behaviour displayed internal consistency given that the lowest shared correlation between its indicants was 0.41 and the highest 0.68.

Similar findings were made regarding the characteristics of the scales for salesperson autonomy (between 0.32 and 0.65), resource availability (between 0.67 and 0.90), pressure to perform (between 0.55 and 0.56) and salesperson self-efficacy (between 0.51 and 0.72). Upon further examination, all selected items proved to be decently spread around the respective means suggesting reasonable variance in the data. Given these findings, it was concluded that the retained items were suitable for inclusion in confirmatory factor analysis.

**Table 10 Profile of variables extracted from EFA**

| Latent Variable (No. of items) | Items | Mean | SD | Alpha | Corrected Item-Total Correlation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Salesperson Creativity (6)** | CREAT2 | 5.51 | .88 | .84 | .57 |
| | CREAT3 | 5.39 | .90 | | .63 |
| | CREAT4 | 5.11 | 1.00 | | .56 |
| | CREAT5 | 5.08 | .84 | | .65 |
| | CREAT6 | 5.05 | .863 | | .65 |
| | CREAT7 | 5.15 | .79 | | .63 |
| **Salesperson Spontaneity (7)** | SPONT1 | 4.98 | 1.13 | .90 | .75 |
| | SPONT2 | 4.91 | 1.11 | | .75 |
| | SPONT3 | 4.74 | 1.02 | | .78 |
| | SPONT4 | 4.48 | 1.16 | | .75 |
| | SPONT5 | 4.59 | 1.01 | | .56 |
| | SPONT6 | 4.52 | 1.06 | | .76 |
| | SPONT7 | 4.53 | 1.22 | | .65 |
| **Adaptive selling behaviour (4)** | ADAPT3 | 5.54 | .94 | .87 | .63 |
| | ADAPT4 | 5.55 | .80 | | .83 |
| | ADAPT5 | 5.49 | .82 | | .82 |
| | ADAPT6 | 5.65 | .77 | | .62 |
| **Salesperson Agency (7)** | AGENCY1 | 5.56 | .76 | .90 | .72 |
| | AGENCY2 | 6.09 | .80 | | .59 |
| | AGENCY3 | 5.63 | .77 | | .76 |
| | AGENCY4 | 5.55 | .80 | | .66 |
| | AGENCY5 | 5.51 | .81 | | .78 |
| | AGENCY6 | 5.50 | .80 | | .73 |
| | AGENCY7 | 5.53 | .76 | | .76 |
| **Sales Performance (7)** | PPERF1 | 5.09 | .94 | .90 | .64 |
| | PPERF2 | 5.01 | .89 | | .64 |
| | PPERF3 | 5.14 | .87 | | .79 |
| | PPERF4 | 5.10 | .91 | | .72 |
| | PPERF5 | 5.17 | .99 | | .82 |
| | PPERF6 | 5.24 | .91 | | .68 |
| | PPERF7 | 5.07 | .89 | | .76 |
| **Salesperson Experience (4)** | EXPERIE1 | 6.04 | 3.59 | .86 | .75 |
| | EXPERIE2 | 3.84 | 2.16 | | .57 |
| | EXPERIE3 | 3.44 | 2.31 | | .79 |
| | EXPERIE4 | 4.14 | 3.05 | | .80 |

**Table 9 Profile of variables extracted from EFA (continued)**

| Latent Variable (No. of items) | Items | Mean | SD | Alpha | Corrected Item-Total Correlation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Salesperson autonomy (7) | AUTON1 | 5.24 | 1.27 | .88 | .62 |
| | AUTON2 | 5.12 | 1.25 | | .77 |
| | AUTON3 | 5.26 | .93 | | .66 |
| | AUTON4 | 4.91 | 1.03 | | .74 |
| | AUTON5 | 5.18 | .90 | | .62 |
| | AUTON6 | 5.08 | .96 | | .62 |
| | AUTON7 | 4.49 | 1.36 | | .67 |
| Salesperson self-Efficacy (5) | EFFI1 | 6.02 | .73 | .88 | .73 |
| | EFFI2 | 6.02 | .82 | | .60 |
| | EFFI4 | 5.56 | .81 | | .76 |
| | EFFI5 | 5.58 | .80 | | .82 |
| | EFFI6 | 5.55 | .76 | | .66 |
| Resource availability (5) | RES1 | 5.43 | 1.20 | .94 | .87 |
| | RES2 | 5.37 | 1.20 | | .89 |
| | RES3 | 5.19 | 1.17 | | .90 |
| | RES4 | 5.08 | 1.21 | | .83 |
| | RES5 | 5.31 | 1.11 | | .77 |
| Pressure to perform (3) | PRESS1 | 5.62 | 1.33 | .78 | .63 |
| | PRESS2 | 5.65 | 1.08 | | .63 |
| | PRESS3 | 5.56 | 1.12 | | .62 |

## 5.5.2 Item selection through CFA

To further assess and purify the measures, the study relied on the CFA procedure to estimate a measurement model. This is usually a logical first step in studies adopting the structural equation modelling (SEM) technique (see Ahearne et al, 2007; Homburg et al., 2011). Even though this study applies a different structural modelling technique, Seemingly Unrelated Regressions (SUR), the use of the confirmatory factor analysis procedure as a prelude to SUR has precedence in recent marketing scholarship (see Katsikeas, Leonidou & Zeriti, 2016; Zhang, Wu & Cui, 2015).

The defining characteristic of the CFA (relative to the EFA) is that it is theory-led. Where EFA allows a statistical method to determine the number and form of latent factors, in estimating a CFA model, the researcher uses theory to pre-specify relationships between constructs and their indicants. This strategy enables researchers to test the extent to which their preconceptions (theory) are replicated in the data

(Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). In other words, the CFA is the researcher's way of either supporting or rejecting their hypotheses about the nature of a construct. The CFA procedure also offers the added advantage of dimensionality assessment by enabling as assessment of convergent validity.

### 5.5.2.1 CFA model specification and assessment

The statistical tool used to estimate the measurement models in this study is EQS (version 6.2). Hair et al (2013) recommend five elements required in CFA model estimation. First is the specification of the latent constructs (denoted as ellipses) on which indicants (the second element; denoted by rectangles) are made to load. Path loadings are depicted as one-head arrows facing from the latent to the indicant. This means that for each latent construct, there should be corresponding paths connecting it to its indicants. Next is the specification of relationships between latent constructs using correlations (denoted by two-headed arrows) because constructs are thought to be exogenous. Finally, each measured indicator variable is associated with a unique error term which explains the extent to which that variable is not explained by the latent factor.

In specifying the CFA model, the researcher followed similar procedures. Specifically, relationships between latent factors and their corresponding indicants were defined *apriori* such that each item was forced to load only one a pre-specified factor (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Individual latent factors were then allowed to correlate with others. In addition, the literature suggests the necessity to constrain either (1) the path coefficient between an indicant of each factor or (2) the coefficient of the factor itself to 1.0 (see Hair et al., 2013). Accordingly, in specifying the measurement model,

the path coefficient between the first variable of each latent factor and the factor itself was fixed to one while the factor coefficient was allowed to be freely estimated.

Due to sample size limitations, the CFA model specification followed a subset strategy. In the interest of proper model convergence, parameter estimate accuracy and statistical power to reject/retain null hypotheses, researchers have turned to larger sample sizes (Gagne & Hancock, 2006). Where this is impractical, scholars recommend a 1:5 ratio between number of parameters in a model and number of observations (Bentler & Chou, 1987).

Accordingly, the researcher estimated four measurement models in the CFA. The first model assessed the dimensionality of the salesperson improvisation construct based on previous theory (Cunha et al., 1999; Moorman & Miner, 1998a; Vera & Crossan, 2005). The second CFA model assessed measures of constructs deemed to be largely under the control of the individual salesperson (individual agency, sales performance, salesperson experience, adaptive selling behaviour and salesperson self-efficacy) while the third consisted of factors controlled by sources external to the individual salesperson (salesperson autonomy, resource availability, pressure to perform). Finally, a fourth CFA model was tested which comprised all the factors included in the three previous models. This was for comparison purposes in keeping with traditions in the marketing discipline (see Boso, 2010).

To test whether the CFA models specified were valid and had good fit with the data, the researcher used a number of measurement assessment criteria (see Table 11). First, items selection at this stage was based on the achievement of a standardized loading of at least 0.5 to confirm their association with specified underlying factors (Hair et al.,

2013). Secondly, the researcher assessed fit for the CFA models using the Chi- square goodness of fit statistic. This statistic examines the extent of discrepancy between the sample and the covariance matrices and should ideally, be non-significant (Hu & Bentler, 1999). However, because the Chi-square statistic is sensitive to sample size, and tends to be significant in larger samples, the study employed additional checks.

First, the researcher computed the normed chi-square by dividing the Chi-square statistic by the degrees of freedom. The rule of thumb is for this adjusted Chi-square to be less than three (<3) (Iacobucci, 2010). Secondly, the researcher used the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) to examine fit between the specified model and the observed covariances (Byrne 2006). Following Iacobucci (2010), the researcher set the criteria for model fit to an RMSEA score of ≤ 0.08.

For additional robustness, the researcher computed three incremental fit statistics: Normed Fit Index (NFI), Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI). The purpose of incremental fit indices is to measure proportionate improvements in fit by comparing the specified model to a competing null model (Byrne, 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Table 11 presents the criteria used assessing CFA model fit.

**Table 11 CFA model fit indices**

| Index | Recommended threshold |
|---|---|
| Chi-Square | >0.05 |
| Normed Chi-Square | <3 |
| Root Mean Square Error of Approximation | ≤0.08 |
| Normed Fit Index | >0.9 |
| Non-Normed Fit Index | >0.95 |
| Comparative Fit Index | >0.95 |
| Normed Fit Index | >0.9 |

*Source: (Hultman, 2008)*

**5.5.2.2 CFA model 1: Scales for Salesperson Improvisation**

In accordance with the multidimensional conceptualization of salesperson improvisation, this CFA model was estimated by including indicants of the two dimensions. This was to enable a test of the null hypothesis that salesperson creativity and salesperson spontaneity do not converge into the salesperson improvisation factor. In specifying this measurement model, path coefficients of the first variable of the creativity and spontaneity scales were fixed to 1.0. Scale purification processes used factor loadings as criteria for item exclusion. As such, items failing to load significantly ($\geq 0.5$) were dropped. Using this criteria, three salesperson creativity and three salesperson spontaneity items were deleted as shown in Appendix 5A.

Results show that the model fits the data suggesting salesperson improvisation as a multi-dimensional construct comprised of salesperson creativity and salesperson spontaneity. All fit statistics for this model are acceptable (see Table 12). Even though the chi-square statistic was significant at the 5% level ($\chi^2_{25.18}$; $df_{13}$; p=0.02), the normed chi-square ($\chi^2/df = 1.93$) was less than the 3.0 threshold (Iacobucci, 2010). A look at the path loadings of the indicants and corresponding t-values also shows that they all loaded significantly, confirming their association with the underlying factors.

Given that the salesperson improvisation construct developed here draws from extant conceptualizations of the improvisation construct, it was necessary to undertake additional assessments to assure that the scale developed represents the construct well. Secondly, the dimension-outcome analysis strategy adopted in this study requires assurance on the dimensional structure of the improvisation construct.

Since previous scholarly work has sometimes operationalised improvisation as a single factor (Moorman & Miner, 1998a) the researcher estimated a competing model in which all items of the two dimensions were forced to load onto one factor ( Vera & Crossan, 2004). Table 12 shows that the multi factor view offers a much better fit to the data than the competing single factor model.

All relevant fit indices for the competing model are weaker than the hypothesized two-factor model. In addition, an examination of the normed chi-square statistic for the two models indicates that the hypothesized measurement model returned a better score ($\chi^2_{25.18}/df_{13}$=1.93, p=0.023) than the competing model ($\chi^2_{120.72}/df_{14}$=8.62, p=0.000). More so, the degrees of freedom associated with the hypothesized model is less than that of the competing model (Boso, 2010).

**Table 12 CFA for the salesperson improvisation construct**

| Hypothesized CFA model | | | | Competing CFA model | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Indicants/ Standardized loadings**[a] | | | | Indicants/ Standardized loadings[a] | |
| Salesperson creativity | | **Salesperson spontaneity** | | **Salesperson improvisation** | |
| CREAT5[b] | .71[b] | SPONT1[b] | .88[b] | CREAT5[b] | .42[b] |
| CREAT6 | .81 (9.03) | SPONT2 | .85 (10.70) | CREAT6 | .41 (3.43) |
| CREAT7 | .72 (7.95) | SPONT3 | .79 (9.69) | CREAT7 | .24 (2.33) |
| | | SPONT6 | .78 (9.57) | SPONT1[b] | .87 (4.73) |
| | | | | SPONT2 | .83 (4.69) |
| | | | | SPONT3 | .78 (4.60) |
| | | | | SPONT6 | .79 (4.61) |

**Hypothesized CFA model Fit Indices**:$\chi^2$=25.18, *df*=13; p=0.02; NFI=0.95; NNFI=0.96; CFI=0.98; RMSEA=0.06
**Competing model Fit Indices**: $\chi^2$=120.71, *df*=14; p=0.000; NFI=0.79; NNFI=0.71; CFI=0.80; RMSEA=0.18
[a] *t*-values in parenthesis    [b] Fixed parameter

### 5.5.2.3 CFA model 2: Person-related factors

In the second CFA model, all items of the remaining person-related factors (individual agency, sales performance, salesperson experience, adaptive selling behaviour, and salesperson self-efficacy) were submitted for analysis. In specifying this measurement

model, path coefficients of the first variable of each factor was fixed to 1.0. Purification processes followed the factor loading criteria such that items failing to load significantly ($\geq 0.5$) were dropped. This led to the exclusion of four agency items, three performance items, one experience item, two efficacy items and one adaptive selling item from further analysis (see Table 15).

The model achieved good fit to data as all fit indices met respective criteria (Table 13). The chi-square statistic was insignificant (p=0.25) with an accompanying normed chi-square of 1.09 well below the 3.0 cut-off. In addition, given that the lowest item loading was 0.71, and also that all t-values were significant, it was concluded that the retained items were suitable for structural model estimation.

**Table 13 CFA 2: person-related factors**

| Factor | Standardized loadings[a] |
|---|---|
| *Individual agency* | |
| AGEN5 | 0.85[b] |
| AGEN6 | 0.78 (9.67) |
| AGEN7 | 0.92 (11.22) |
| *Sales performance* | |
| PERF3[b] | 0.84 [b] |
| PERF4 | 0.79 (9.69) |
| PERF5 | 0.91 (11.57) |
| PERF7 | 0.77 (9.29) |
| *Adaptive selling* | |
| ADAPT3 | 0.71[b] |
| ADAPT4 | 0.95 (8.86) |
| ADAPT5 | 0.87 (8.70) |
| *Salesperson experience* | |
| EXPER1[b] | 0.85[b] |
| EXPER3 | 0.78 (9.52) |
| EXPER4 | 0.93 (11.02) |
| *Salesperson self-efficacy* | |
| EFFI4 | .87[b] |
| EFFI5 | .93 (12.58) |
| EFFI6 | .77 (9.78) |

**Fit Indices**: $\chi^2$= 102.67; *df* =92; p=0.25; NFI=0.93; NNFI=0.99; CFI=0.99; RMSEA=0.02
[a] *t*-values in parenthesis  [b] Fixed parameter

**5.5.2.4 CFA model 3: Environment-related factors**

The third measurement model included the three remaining (environment-related) factors in the research model: resource availability, pressure to perform and salesperson autonomy. All 15 items retained after the exploratory factor analysis were included in this measurement model. Each item was forced to load on its respective factor while the path coefficient of the first items of each factor was fixed to 1.0. Items failing to load highly on the corresponding factors were deleted. As with the other two models, this CFA model also attained acceptable fit to show that the model represented the data well (see Table 14).

**Table 14 CFA3 Environment-related factors**

| Factor | Standardized loadings[a] |
|---|---|
| *Autonomy* | |
| AUTON2 | 0.87[b] |
| AUTON3 | 0.78 (8.66) |
| AUTON4 | 0.75 (8.41) |
| *Resource availability* | |
| RES1 | 0.95[b] |
| RES2 | 0.94 (21.25) |
| RES3 | 0.91 (18.82) |
| RES4 | 0.83 (14.15) |
| *Pressure to perform* | |
| PRESS1 | 0.74[b] |
| PRESS2 | 0.79 (6.82) |
| PRESS3 | 0.70 (6.55) |

**Fit Indices:** $\chi^2$ =60.73; *df* =32; p=0.00; NFI=0.94; NNFI=0.96; CFI=0.97; RMSEA=0.06
[a] *t*-values in parenthesis  [b] Fixed parameter

**5.5.2.5 CFA model 4: simultaneous analysis of all scales**

For the purposes of robustness, a final CFA model was estimated in which all the factors examined in the preceding measurement models were included (Cadogan, Cui, Morgan, & Story, 2006). A total of 33 items, retained after the preceding measure assessment and purification were submitted in this simultaneous CFA. The model converged with all fit criteria being attained (Table 15). Given the large number of

items included in this model, the fact of the model convergence provided strong indication that all construct measures were acceptable. Even though the chi-square statistic returned was significant at the five percent level, all other fit statistics were acceptable. However, for the purposes of assuring fit to data and robustness, the normed chi-square statistic was computed ($\chi^2_{633.23}/df_{450}$=1.40, p=0.00) and found to be well below the upper limit of 3.0 (Iacobucci, 2010). As such, these measures were considered robust and subsequently used as the basis of structural model estimation (see Appendix 5A for a full description of the measures).

**Table 15 Results of simultaneous analysis of all multi-item scales**

| Factor | Item | Standardized loadings[a] |
|---|---|---|
| **Salesperson creativity** | CREAT5[b] | 0.71 |
| | CREAT6 | 0.78(7.78) |
| | CREAT7 | 0.76 (7.63) |
| **Salesperson spontaneity** | SPONT1[b] | 0.89 |
| | SPONT2 | 0.84 (12.89) |
| | SPONT3 | 0.79 (11.57) |
| | SPONT6 | 0.77 (11.20) |
| **Individual agency** | AGEN5 | 0.88 |
| | AGEN6 | 0.83 (12.10) |
| | AGEN7 | 0.84 (12.26) |
| **Sales performance** | PERF3[b] | 0.84 |
| | PERF4 | 0.80 (11.37) |
| | PERF5 | 0.90 (13.40) |
| | PERF7 | 0.77 (10.81) |
| **Salesperson experience** | EXPER1[b] | 0.85 |
| | EXPER3 | 0.78 (11.15) |
| | EXPER4 | 0.93 (13.03) |
| **Salesperson autonomy** | AUTON2[b] | 0.83 |
| | AUTON3 | 0.82 (9.90) |
| | AUTON4 | 0.75 (9.19) |
| **Resource availability** | RES1[b] | 0.95 |
| | RES2 | 0.94 (22.93) |
| | RES3 | 0.91 (20.18) |
| | RES4 | 0.83 (15.21) |
| **Pressure to perform** | PRES1[b] | 0.74 |
| | PRES2 | 0.806 (7.56) |
| | PRES3 | 0.68 (7.01) |
| **Adaptive selling behaviour** | ADAPT3 | 0.72 |
| | ADAPT4 | 0.92 (10.37) |
| | ADAPT5 | 0.88 (10.17) |
| **Salesperson self-efficacy** | EFFI4 | 0.87[b] |
| | EFFI5 | 0.93 (14.31) |
| | EFFI5 | 0.77 (11.13) |
| **Fit Indices:**$\chi^2$ =633.23; *df* =450; p=0.00; NFI=0.90; NNFI=0.96; CFI=0.96; RMSEA=0.04 | | |
| [a] *t*-values in parenthesis   [b] Fixed parameter | | |

**5.6 Validity and reliability**

The study also examined construct reliability and validity (both convergent and discriminant) to establish the extent to which the measures (1) reflected their latent constructs and also (2) discriminated from other constructs (Hair et al., 2013). Convergent validity assesses whether items of a given factor share a high proportion of variance in common, assuring the assumption that they function together as elements of an underlying factor (Hair et al., 2013). Discriminant validity, on the other hand, indicates individual constructs' uniqueness and ability to differentiate from others while reliability assesses the extent of consistency of a measure (Hair et al., 2013).

To test for reliability and convergent validity, the researcher computed the average variance extracted by each construct and found it to meet the minimum criteria of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2006). Values ranged between .50 and .67. Secondly, composite reliability (CR) which indicates that measures consistently represent the same factor (Hair et al., 2013) ranged between 0.71 and 0.89, well within the accepted cut-off point of .70 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Lastly, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for each construct was higher than 0.70 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012) ranging between 0.78 and 0.95. Altogether, these statistics indicate internal consistency of the constructs, thereby establishing convergent validity (see Appendix 5D for a full description of the internal properties of the final scales).

To assess discriminant validity, the researcher computed construct inter-correlations and found the correlations between each pair of constructs to be significantly different from 1.0 (Table 16). Construct inter-correlations ranged between 0.00 and 0.55 suggesting that underlying factors differentiate from each other. Next, following

Fornell and Larcker (1981), the researcher computed the highest shared variance (HSV) between each pair of constructs by generating the squared terms of their inter-correlations. These were, then, compared to the AVE of the respective constructs. In all cases, the HSV between pairs of constructs was significantly lower than the variance extracted in each construct. This confirmed discriminant validity.

## 5.7 Descriptive analysis of scales

Having completed scale purification and quality assessments, the next step is to assess the descriptive characteristics of the various construct measures as a precursor to their inclusion in further analysis and hypotheses testing. Primarily, the goal of this exercise is to assure data normality as a basis for the selection of appropriate statistical technique for hypotheses testing. The researcher examined each scale individually for the extent of their normality using Skewness and Kurtosis criteria (Finch, West, & MacKinnon, 1997). According to Finch et al. (1997), skewness higher than three and kurtosis higher than 21 indicate non-normality and require remedies. All except one of the scales met this skewness criteria having ranged between -1.36 and 0.60 (Table 16). This indicates that the scales did not deviate significantly from normality.

The exceptional case was the experience scale which had a skewness score of 4.32. Findings from the assessment of scale kurtosis followed a similar pattern with the experience scale being the only one that presented extreme departure from normality. To remedy this, a natural logarithm of this scale's items was calculated before being included in hypotheses testing (Osborne & Waters, 2002).

**Table 16 Measurement statistics and construct inter-correlations**

| Construct | Mean | SD | Skew | Kurt | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Salesperson creativity | | | | | **.79** | .13 | .09 | .11 | .00 | .00 | .17 | .08 | .02 | .00 | .00 | .00 |
| | 5.09 | .70 | -.17 | 1.50 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Salesperson spontaneity | | | | | | **.89** | .06 | .00 | .02 | .02 | .06 | .01 | .12 | .05 | .00 | .01 |
| | 4.79 | .94 | -1.23 | 2.47 | .37** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Adaptive selling[a] | | | | | | | **.87** | .09 | .02 | .00 | .17 | .11 | .11 | .10 | .00 | .00 |
| | 5.53 | .77 | -.72 | 2.32 | .30** | .25** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Individual agency | | | | | | | | **.88** | .00 | .04 | .02 | .30 | .00 | .02 | .01 | .00 |
| | 5.51 | .72 | .25 | -.10 | .34** | -.08 | .31** | | | | | | | | | |
| Sales performance | | | | | | | | | **.89** | .00 | .01 | .03 | .06 | .01 | .00 | .00 |
| | 5.12 | .80 | -.70 | 2.24 | -.00 | .17* | .17* | .01 | | | | | | | | |
| Salesperson experience | | | | | | | | | | **.87** | .00 | .04 | .00 | .00 | .02 | .00 |
| | 4.54 | 2.71 | 4.32 | 31.38 | .02 | -.16* | .00 | .21** | .06 | | | | | | | |
| Salesperson autonomy | | | | | | | | | | | **.83** | .03 | .13 | .02 | .01 | .01 |
| | 5.09 | .93 | -.91 | 1.36 | .42** | .26** | .41** | .16* | .12 | .08 | | | | | | |
| Salesperson self-efficacy | | | | | | | | | | | | **.89** | .00 | .00 | .00 | .00 |
| | 5.56 | .72 | .12 | -.30 | .28** | -.11 | .34** | .55** | .18** | .21** | .19** | | | | | |
| Resource availability | | | | | | | | | | | | | **.95** | .13 | .00 | .00 |
| | 5.27 | 1.12 | -.88 | .76 | .17* | .35** | .33** | .03 | .26** | -.03 | .37** | -.07 | | | | |
| Pressure to perform | | | | | | | | | | | | | | **.78** | .00 | .00 |
| | 5.61 | .99 | -.72 | .24 | .04 | .22** | .32** | .13 | .11 | .03 | .15* | .02 | .36** | | | |
| Compensation type | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | **NA** | .02 |
| | 2.40 | 2.12 | .60 | -.07 | -.04 | .03 | -.03 | -.12 | .05 | .16* | .12 | -.00 | -.03 | -.00 | | |
| Industry type | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | .14* | **NA** |
| | .37 | .48 | .53 | -1.73 | -.05 | -.12 | .00 | .03 | -.06 | .01 | -.12 | -.05 | -.07 | .06 | | |
| CR | | | | | **.72** | **.83** | **.81** | **.81** | **.83** | **.81** | **.77** | **.82** | **.89** | **.71** | **NA** | **NA** |
| AVE | | | | | **.52** | **.53** | **.59** | **.59** | **.56** | **.59** | **.52** | **.60** | **.67** | **.50** | **NA** | **NA** |

*Correlations significant: at the 0.05 level; ** Correlations significant at the 0.01 level; construct inter-correlations below diagonal; Cronbach alpha on diagonal; Highest shared variance above diagonal; [a]Adaptive selling behaviour*

## 5.8 Common Method Variance

Another important issue requiring attention in survey research is the potential influence of common method variance (CMV). Podsakoff et al. (2003, p. 879) define CMV as "variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measures represent". Where the effect of such method bias is present, it may lead researchers to misleading conclusions.

Two common sources of common method variance may be implicated in this study by virtue of its design. The first, self-report bias where the same person rates scales for both predictor and criterion variables may have arisen due to the use of subjective performance ratings in this study. In the second case, social desirability (the tendency for respondents to seek social acceptance by submitting seemingly 'face-saving' responses) may be present due to the personalised survey administration method used.

With these potential sources of method bias, the study sought to assess its influence *post ante* using Harman's single-factor test (using a CFA) to check spurious correlations between variables. The presence of such spurious correlations suggests a single underlying common method factor. This was done by evaluating fit for a multi-factor model versus a constrained single-factor model. In this procedure, the presence of CMV is observable when fit for the unconstrained (multi-factor) model is significantly worse than that of the constrained model.

In such a situation, because the constrained model produces better fit, it could be argued that CMV is responsible for the observed relationships between variables. As

shown in Table 17, however, fit for the measurement models used in the study were markedly better than the model fit for the constrained single factor model. This suggests that CMV is not a major issue.

**Table 17 Results of Harman's single factor tests**

| CFA subjects | Models | $\chi^2$ /df | RMSEA | NNFI | NFI | CFI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Salesperson Creativity Salesperson spontaneity | Measurement model | 25.18/13 | 0.06 | 0.96 | 0.95 | 0.97 |
| | CMV (constrained) Model | 120.71/14 | 0.18 | 0.71 | 0.79 | 0.80 |
| Salesperson self-efficacy Salesperson experience | Measurement model | 102.67/94 | 0.02 | 0.99 | 0.93 | 0.99 |
| Individual agency Sales performance Adaptive selling | CMV (constrained) model | 886.64/104 | 0.18 | 0.36 | 0.42 | 0.45 |
| Salesperson autonomy Resource availability | Measurement model | 60.74/32 | 0.06 | 0.96 | 0.94 | 0.97 |
| Pressure to perform | CMV (constrained) model | 282.40/35 | 0.18 | 0.68 | 0.73 | 0.75 |

However, given recent criticisms that this test is too lenient (Malhotra, Kim & Patil, 2006) and recommendations to use multiple methods (Chang, Van Witteloostuijn & Eden, 2010), the researcher used an additional test to assess the extent of method bias. Specifically, the more stringent marker variable technique (Lindell & Whitney, 2001) was applied *post hoc* (Malhotra et al., 2006).

This method requires researchers to identify the sources of potential bias in their data and include a measure of such in the research instrument prior to data collection (Malhotra et al., 2006). However, this study did not account for such a marker variable *ex ante*. Accordingly, the researcher used an alternative approach suggested by Lindell and Whitney (2001). According to Lindell and Whitney (2001), where an *ex ante* marker variable is unavailable, researchers may use the second-lowest positive correlation, among variables as a proxy. Using this criteria, the researcher

selected the second lowest positive correlation among the study variables (0.02) as the basis for CMV adjustment. Using the formulae below, the researcher computed CMV-adjusted correlations and corresponding *t*-values. The results are displayed on the CMV-adjusted correlation matrix in Table 18.

(Malhotra et al., 2006).

$$r_A = \frac{r_u - r_m}{1 - r_m}, \quad 2 \qquad\qquad t_{\alpha/2, n-3} = \frac{r_A}{\sqrt{(1 - r_A^2)/(n-3)}}$$

Where:

$R_U$ = uncorrected (pre-adjustment) correlation

$r_M$ = the second-smallest positive correlation between the variables in the study

(indicating the second most theoretically unrelated variables)

$r_A$ = CMV-adjusted correlation between the variables under investigation

Table 18 shows the CMV-adjusted correlations among the study variables (upper diagonal). Using two-tailed test criteria, an examination of the t-values showed that the slight difference between the original and the CMV-adjusted correlations did not make much difference to the statistical significance of the correlations. The majority of the original correlations remained significant after the CMV adjustment giving the assurance that the relationships tested in the empirical model are unlikely to have been inflated by method bias (Malhotra et al., 2006).

Finally, given that the conceptual model includes multiple interaction effect paths, it is unlikely that respondents could form mental models of the relationships examined (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

**Table 18 CMV-adjusted construct inter-correlations**

| Construct | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Salesperson creativity | **1** | 0.36[**] | 0.29[**] | 0.33[**] | -0.02 | 0.00 | 0.41[**] | 0.27[**] | 0.15 | 0.02 | -0.01 | -0.01 |
| Salesperson spontaneity | .37[**] | **1** | 0.24[**] | -0.10 | 0.15 | -0.18[**] | 0.25[**] | -0.13 | 0.34[**] | 0.21[**] | 0.01 | -0.14[*] |
| Adaptive selling behaviour | .30[**] | .25[**] | **1** | 0.30[**] | 0.16 | -0.01 | 0.40[**] | 0.33[**] | 0.32[**] | 0.31[**] | -0.05 | -0.02 |
| Individual agency | .34[**] | -.08 | .31[**] | **1** | 0.00 | 0.20[**] | 0.15 | 0.54[**] | 0.01 | 0.11 | -0.14[*] | 0.01 |
| Sales performance | -.00 | .17[*] | .17[*] | .01 | **1** | 0.05 | 0.11 | 0.16 | 0.25[**] | 0.09 | 0.03 | -0.08 |
| Salesperson experience | .02 | -.16[*] | .00 | .21[**] | .06 | **1** | 0.07 | 0.19[**] | -0.05 | 0.01 | 0.14 | -0.01 |
| Salesperson autonomy | .42[**] | .26[**] | .41[**] | .16[*] | .12 | .08 | **1** | 0.17[*] | 0.36[**] | 0.13 | 0.10 | -0.14 |
| Salesperson self-efficacy | .28[**] | -.11 | .34[**] | .55[**] | .18[**] | .21[**] | .19[**] | **1** | -0.09 | 0.00 | -0.02 | -0.07 |
| Resource availability | .17[*] | .35[**] | .33[**] | .03 | .26[**] | -.03 | .37[**] | -.07 | **1** | 0.35[**] | -0.05 | -0.09 |
| Pressure to perform | .04 | .22[**] | .32[**] | .13 | .11 | .03 | .15[*] | .02 | .36[**] | **1** | -0.02 | 0.04 |
| Compensation type | -.04 | .03 | -.03 | -.12 | .05 | .16[*] | .12 | -.00 | -.03 | -.00 | **1** | 0.12 |
| Industry type | -.05 | -.12 | .00 | .03 | -.06 | .01 | -.12 | -.05 | -.07 | .06 | .14[*] | **1** |

[*]Correlations significant: at the 0.05 level; [**] Correlations significant at the 0.01 level; CMV adjustment above diagonal; original correlations below diagonal

**5.9 Hypotheses testing**

To test the hypotheses, a common practice in the sales and marketing literature is to rely on a structural equation modelling approach (Ahearne et al, 2007; Homburg et al., 2011). The benefit of SEM is that it helps researchers to: (a) test relationships among multiple response and predictor variables; (b) assess latent variables and errors in measurements for observed variables; and (c) test *a priori* theory-led assumptions against data (Chin, 1998).

While the SEM approach is a widely accepted model estimation technique, it is also widely known that it suffers some limitations. Specifically, the SEM technique (either covariance-based or Partial Least Squared-based) can: (a) constrain model identification as model complexity increases; (b) be prone to biased test statistics owing to its sensitivity to sample size and (c) be overly sensitive to error variances in the data (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle & Mena, 2012; Reinartz, Haenlein & Henseler, 2009). This is because in complex models, such techniques "do not control the contingent and chained effects of one part of the model's errors to another" (Hair et al., 2012, p. 416).

Given these limitations, marketing scholars are now turning to alternative estimation methods for testing structural relationships. One such method that has widely been used in economics research (e.g., Dufour & Khalaf, 2002; McElroy & Burmeister, 1988; Srivastava & Dwivedi, 1979; ) and is now gaining strong recognition in marketing research (see Bahadir, DeKinder & Kohli, 2015; Homburg, Vomberg, Enke

& Grimm, 2015; Katsikeas et al, 2016; Mishra & Modi, 2016) is the Seemingly Unrelated Regressions (SUR) technique (Zellner, 1962). This technique enables researchers to estimate a series of models in one regression system of equations. Because multiple equations are simultaneously estimated, the technique yields more efficiency in coefficient estimators compared to that obtained from an equation-by-equation application of ordinary least squares (Zellner 1962). The SUR technique also accounts for contemporaneous correlations in cross-equation errors (Katsikeas et al, 2016) to control for "the contingent and chained effects of one part of the model's errors to another", a benefit that is unavailable to SEM (Hair et al., 2012, p. 416). Given these benefits, SUR is acclaimed as a procedure that "allows for a statistically flexible, robust, yet easily interpretable methodological framework" (Mishra & Modi, 2016, p. 36).

One major consideration accounted for the use of the SUR technique in this study. The nature of the linkages between two of the study's dependent variables (i.e. salesperson creativity and salesperson spontaneity) suggests that they are correlated. Given that the two variables have been conceptualised and validated as dimensions of salesperson improvisation, it can be expected that both their traits and associated error terms could be correlated. Modelling one variable without the presence of the other may render the estimated results unstable.

In particular, it is possible that some shared characteristics between the two variables that are not considered by the explanatory variables may influence the errors of their respective equations in a similar way (Zhang et al., 2015). The SUR technique

provides an opportunity to explore this possibility. Accordingly, the study relied on the Breusch-Pagan test of independence to assess the extent of correlations between the errors of the different models estimated. Results show significant error correlation across the three final equations (Models 2, 4 and 7 below) ($\chi^2_{(df=3)} = 27.41$; p <0.00), providing justification for its application in the study (Katsikeas et al., 2016; Zellner, 1962).

In applying the technique, seven regression models were estimated. Model 1 contains the effects of two control variables (industry type and compensation type) on salesperson creativity while Model 2 adds the effects of the drivers of salesperson creativity. In Models 3, the controls are regressed on salesperson spontaneity followed by direct effects of the antecedents (Model 4). Models 5 contains the effects of three control variables (industry type, compensation type and adaptive selling behaviour) on sales performance. In Model 6, the direct effects of salesperson creativity and spontaneity and the three moderating variables (resource availability, pressure to perform and individual agency) are added to Model 5. Finally, Model 7 adds the effects of the interactions of the three boundary variables to Model 6. In all cases, the STATA 14.0 statistical tool was used to estimate the relationships. The set of SUR models estimated are as follows:

Salesperson creativity = $c_1 + [\gamma_1 INDUS + \gamma_2 COMPEN] + \varepsilon_1$

Model 1

Salesperson creativity = $c_2 + [\gamma_1 INDUS + \gamma_2 COMPEN] + [\gamma_3 EFFI + \gamma_4 EXPER + \gamma_5 AUTON] + \varepsilon_2$

Model 2

Salesperson spontaneity = $c_3 + [\gamma_1 INDUS + \gamma_2 COMPEN] + \varepsilon_3$

Model 3

| | |
|---|---|
| Salesperson spontaneity = | $c_4 + [\gamma_1 INDUS + \gamma_2 COMPEN] + [\gamma_3 EFFI + \gamma_4 EXPER + \gamma_5 AUTON +] + \varepsilon_4$ |

Model 4

| | |
|---|---|
| Sales performance = | $c_5 + [\gamma_1 INDUS + \gamma_2 COMPEN + \gamma_3 ADAPT] + \varepsilon_5$ |

Model 5

| | |
|---|---|
| Sales performance = | $c_6 + [\gamma_1 INDUS + \gamma_2 COMPEN + \gamma_3 ADAPT] + [\gamma_4 CREAT + \gamma_5 SPONT + \gamma_6 RES + \gamma_7 PRESS + \gamma_8 AGEN] + \varepsilon_6$ |

Model 6

| | |
|---|---|
| Sales performance = | $c_7 + [\gamma_1 INDUS + \gamma_2 COMPEN + \gamma_3 ADAPT] + [\gamma_4 CREAT + \gamma_5 SPONT + \gamma_6 RES + \gamma_7 PRESS + \gamma_8 AGEN] + [\gamma_9 CRXRES + \gamma_{10} CRXPRESS + \gamma_{11} CRXAGEN + \gamma_{12} SPXRES + \gamma_{13} SPXPRESS + \gamma_{14} SPXAGEN] + \varepsilon_7$ |

Model 7

Where c = constant, ADAPT = adaptive selling behaviour, INDUS = industry type, COMPEN = compensation type, CREAT = salesperson creativity, SPONT = salesperson spontaneity, AUTON = salesperson autonomy, EXPER = salesperson experience, EFFI = salesperson self-efficacy, RES = resource availability, PRESS = pressure to perform, AGEN = individual agency and ε = error term.

In line with Ping (1995), composites of all multi-item construct scales were computed by averaging scores for individual items. In estimating the interaction terms, variables involved in the interaction effect relationships were mean-centred before their cross products were computed. This helped reduce multicollinearity problems and provide unbiased parameter estimates (Aiken, West & Reno, 1991).

## 5.10 Control paths

Previous scholarship has established links between sales performance and key constructs that have implications of the salesperson improvisation and its outcomes. These are (1) adaptive selling behaviour (Porter et al., 2003; Spiro & Weitz, 1990); compensation type (Banker, Lee, Potter, & Srinivasan, 2000; Chonko, Tanner Jr, & Weeks, 1992; Rao, 1990) and industry type (Hitt, Ireland, & Stadter, 1982; Sin et al., 2005). In order not to be duplicative, the model controlled for these effects.

## 5.11 Results

Results of the hypotheses testing suggest that the full models have substantial explanatory power. The model predicting salesperson creativity returned an $R^2$ of 0.22 while that predicting salesperson spontaneity had an $R^2$ of 0.13. Finally the model predicting sales performance had an $R^2$ of 0.16.

Table 19 presents path coefficients and corresponding t-values and standard errors. The table also shows significance levels of the structural paths as well as $\chi^2$ and $R^2$ values for each model estimated. Following established traditions in sales scholarship, the researcher interprets the findings using two-tailed tests (critical t-value= 1.96; p-value b .05) (Futrell & Parasuraman, 1984).

**Table 19 Results of SUR estimation**

| Predictors | Dependent variable | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Salesperson creativity | | | | Salesperson spontaneity | | | | Sales performance | | | | | |
| | Model1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | | Model 5 | | Model 6 | | Model 7 | |
| | Coefficient (t-value) | Std. error | Coefficient (t-value) | Std. error | Coefficient (t-value) | Std. error | Coefficient (t-value) | Std. error | Coefficient (t-value) | Std. error | Coefficient (t-value) | Std. error | Coefficient (t-value) | Std. error |
| Industry | -.09 (-.62) | .14 | .05 (.38) | .13 | -.27 (-1.93)* | .14 | -.21 (-1.56) | .13 | -.12 (-1.06) | .11 | -.08 (-.80) | .11 | -.06 (-.53) | .11 |
| Compensation | -.02 (-.48) | .03 | -.04 (-1.35) | .03 | .02 (.66) | .03 | .02 (.48) | .03 | .02 (1.00) | .02 | .03 (1.02) | .02 | .03 (1.22) | .02 |
| Adaptive beh[a] | | | | | | | | | .18 (2.61)*** | .07 | .11 (1.40) | .08 | .06 (.77) | .08 |
| Self-efficacy | | | .30 (3.50)*** | .09 | | | -.20 (-2.24)** | .09 | | | | | | |
| Experience | | | -.02 (-.72) | .02 | | | -.06 (-2.50)** | .02 | | | | | | |
| Autonomy | | | .42 (6.35)*** | .07 | | | .30 (4.33)*** | .07 | | | | | | |
| Creativity | | | | | | | | | | | -.04 (-.75) | .06 | .06 (.86) | .08 |
| Spontaneity | | | | | | | | | | | .03 (.64) | .06 | .02 (.28) | .08 |
| Resource | | | | | | | | | | | .17 (2.87)*** | .06 | .17 (3.02)*** | .06 |
| Pressure[b] | | | | | | | | | | | -.01 (-.25) | .06 | -.02 (-.41) | .06 |
| Agency | | | | | | | | | | | .02 (.19) | .08 | .01 (.18) | .08 |
| CR*RES[c] | | | | | | | | | | | | | .10 (2.09)** | .05 |
| CR*PRESS[d] | | | | | | | | | | | | | .01 (.21) | .05 |
| CR*AGEN[e] | | | | | | | | | | | | | -.11 (-2.30)** | .05 |
| SP*RES[f] | | | | | | | | | | | | | .02 (.27) | .07 |
| SP*PRESS[g] | | | | | | | | | | | | | -.09 (-1.93)* | .05 |
| SP*AGEN[h] | | | | | | | | | | | | | .02 (.32) | .05 |
| $\chi^2$ | 1.00 | | 63.95 | | 3.89 | | 33.00 | | 8.48 | | 19.47 | | .37.96 | |
| $R^2$ | .00 | | .22 | | .02 | | .13 | | .04 | | .09 | | .16 | |

*N = 218; \*p < 0.10 = 1.64; \*\*p < 0.05 = 1.96; \*\*\*p < 0.01 = 2.57. Two-tailed significance levels*
*[a]Adaptive selling behaviour; [b]Pressure to perform; [c]Creativity and resource availability interaction term; [d]Creativity and pressure to perform interaction term; [e]Creativity and agency interaction term; [f]Spontaneity and resource avaialability interaction term; [g]Spontaneity and pressure to perform interaction term; [h]Spontaneity and agency interaction term*

### 5.11.1 Drivers of salesperson improvisation

Relative to the hypothesized paths, the study finds that salesperson self-efficacy is positively related to salesperson creativity ($\gamma = .30$, $t = 3.50$ $p<.01$), providing support for H1a. Contrary to the direction of effects hypothesized in H1b, however, the study finds that self-efficacy negatively relates to salesperson spontaneity ($\gamma = -.20$, $t = -2.24$, $p<.05$). In H2a and H2b, the study hypothesized a positive and negative relationship between salesperson experience, and salesperson creativity and spontaneity, respectively. Findings support H2b ($\gamma = -.06$, $t = -2.50$, $p<.05$) but not H2a ($\gamma = -.02$, $t = -.72$, $n.s.$). As expected, salesperson autonomy relates positively to both creativity ($\gamma = .42$, $t = 6.35$, $p<.01$) and spontaneity ($\gamma = .30$, $t = 4.33$, $p<.01$) providing support for H3a and H3b.

### 5.11.2 Salesperson improvisation and sales performance

Arguing that salesperson improvisation is a valuable descriptive decision-based behaviour from which organizations may extract sales success, the study proposed positive links between its dimensions and sales performance. The purpose of this decomposed analysis strategy is to bring clarity to the equivocal evidence in the improvisation literature regarding its value. By decomposing the construct into its dimensions and examining their unique contributions, there is opportunity to understand whether they act differently. The study finds that neither of the two dimensions is, by itself, significantly related to sales performance. Both H4a and H4b failed to find support in the data ($\gamma = -.04$, $t = -.75$, $n.s.$; $\gamma = .03$, $t = .64$, $n.s.$).

### 5.11.3 Contingent effects of resource availability, pressure to perform and individual agency

This section presents the findings on how the boundaries of these effects are shaped. In the first set of hypotheses on the boundaries of salesperson improvisation, the study examined the moderating role of resource availability in shaping the boundaries of salesperson improvisation. Specifically, H5a predicted that the hypothesized positive creativity–sales performance relationship is stronger with a high resource availability. This hypothesis was supported ($\gamma$ = .10; t =2.09; p <0.05). However, the study failed to find support for H5b which argued a stronger positive relationship between salesperson spontaneity and sales performance, given high resource availability ($\gamma$ = .02; $t$ = .27; *n.s.*).

The study hypothesized performance pressure weakens the hypothesized positive relationship between the dimensions of salesperson improvisation and sales performance. H6a which predicted a negative moderating role of pressure to perform over the creativity–performance link did not find support in the data ($\gamma$ = .01; t =.21; *n.s.*). H6b made a similar prediction about the moderating role of pressure to perform on the spontaneity–performance link. This hypothesis was supported at the ten percent confidence level ($\gamma$ = -.09; t =-1.93; p <0.10). Finally, the last set of hypotheses predicted an attenuating influence of individual agency on the salesperson improvisation–performance link. In H7a, the study hypothesized that salesperson creativity during improvisation suffers in its benefits as a function of the salespersons' agency disposition. H7b, on the other hand, predicted that individual agency weakened the hypothesized positive link between salesperson spontaneity and sales performance. Only the former, H7a, was supported by the data ($\gamma$ = -.11; t =-2.30; p <0.05). H7b failed to find support in the data ($\gamma$ = .02; t =.32; *n.s.*).

**Figure 3 Empirical model**
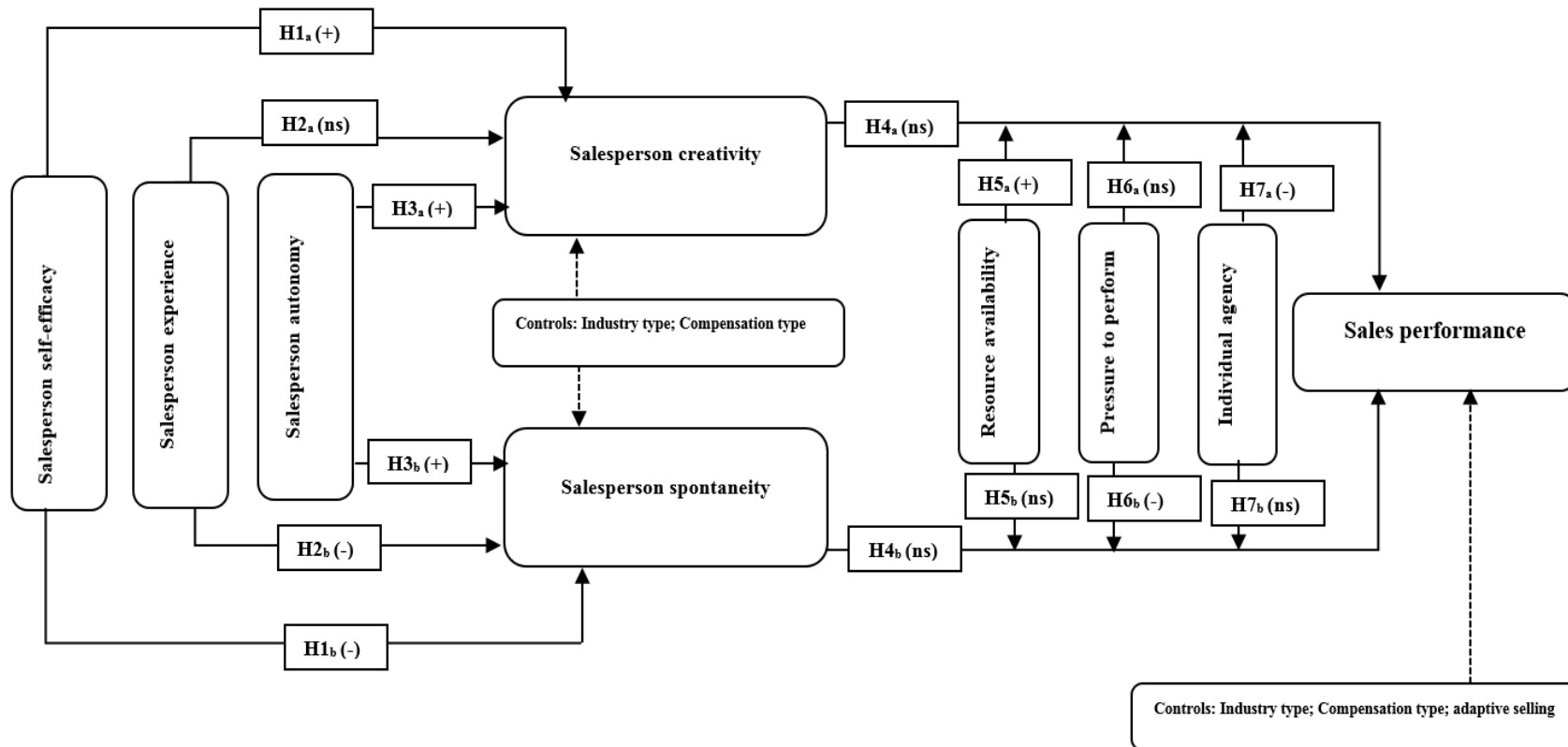
## 5.12 Post Hoc analysis

## 5.12.1 Multicollinearity, suppression and interaction among salesperson improvisation dimensions

The study found both dimensions of salesperson improvisation to be unrelated to sales performance. Given that this contradicts existing theory, particularly in the case of creativity (Breakspear, 2013; Eisenhardt, 1989; Wang & Miao, 2015), further checks were undertaken to ensure findings are not due to multicollinearity or suppression effects. Grewal, Cote, and Baumgartner (2004) assert that multicollinearity, high correlations between latent exogenous constructs, may result in non-significant and wrong coefficient signs. Similarly suppression, independent variables correlated with others but uncorrelated with the dependent variable and with a tendency to increase the variance explained ($R^2$), (Friedman & Wall, 2005) may result in unstable causal relationships.

To ensure that these issues do not challenge the stability of the study's findings, the researcher examined correlations among the two dimensions of salesperson improvisation for possible multicollinearity. As previous discussed the data on the respective constructs demonstrate adequate discriminant validity. While the correlation between salesperson creativity and salesperson spontaneity were among the highest in the correlation matrix, (0.37; See Table 16), it is nonetheless within reasonable limits (Grewal et al., 2004). Further, the highest shared variance between the two constructs is lower than the average variance extracted from either of them.

The researcher also followed Neter, Wasserman and Kutner (1985), to subject the full model (Model 7) containing both direct and moderated paths to a Variance Inflation

Factor (VIF) test. VIF scores higher than 10 indicate multicollinearity. The researcher estimated a univariate model using the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) technique. Both salesperson creativity and salesperson spontaneity have VIF scores significantly less than 10 with accompanying tolerance (TOL) levels of 0.44 and 0.43 respectively (see Table 20). Together, these tests give the assurance that multicollinearity does not account for the findings on salesperson creativity and spontaneity.

**Table 20 Collinearity statistics for the independent effects model**

| Predictors | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. | TOL[a] | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 3.40 | .65 | | 5.18 | .00 | | |
| Industry type | -.05 | .11 | -.03 | -.45 | .64 | .90 | 1.10 |
| Compensation type | .02 | .02 | .07 | 1.14 | .25 | .92 | 1.07 |
| Adaptive selling behaviour | .06 | .08 | .06 | .80 | .41 | .68 | 1.46 |
| Salesperson creativity | .04 | .11 | .03 | .38 | .70 | .44 | 2.30 |
| Salesperson spontaneity | .06 | .08 | .07 | .72 | .46 | .43 | 2.31 |
| Resource availability | .15 | .05 | .21 | 2.90 | .00 | .73 | 1.35 |
| Pressure to perform | -.02 | .06 | -.02 | -.40 | .69 | .76 | 1.31 |
| Individual agency | .02 | .08 | .02 | .29 | .77 | .71 | 1.40 |
| CR*RES | .10 | .05 | .17 | 2.04 | .04 | .56 | 1.77 |
| CR*PRES | .01 | .04 | .01 | .22 | .82 | .73 | 1.36 |
| CR*AGEN | -.11 | .05 | -.18 | -2.24 | .02 | .58 | 1.72 |
| SP*RES | .02 | .07 | .02 | .29 | .77 | .57 | 1.74 |
| SP*PRES | -.09 | .04 | -.14 | -1.90 | .05 | .71 | 1.39 |
| SP*AG | .01 | .05 | .03 | .32 | .74 | .48 | 2.07 |
| *Dependent variable: Sales performance;*  *[a] Tolerance* | | | | | | | |

Importantly, path coefficients and significance levels in this model are analogous to those reported from the study's hypotheses tests using the SUR technique. Both salesperson creativity and spontaneity are not directly related to sales performance. Creativity becomes stronger and weaker given high levels of resource availability and individual agency respectively.

On the other hand, the relationship between spontaneity and sales performance conditioned by pressure to perform. Given that these findings wholly replicate the hypotheses findings, it shows that the study results are not contaminated by the estimation technique used. As such, one could argue for the robustness of the study's hypotheses findings.

Regarding the possibility that the effects of salesperson creativity and spontaneity may have been suppressed, the standard errors of the beta coefficients for the two dimensions were examined. According to Tzelgov and Henik (1991), where suppression is a problem, high correlations between predictors may increase the standard error estimate for the beta coefficients. This is such that beta coefficients of suppressed variables would have very high errors of estimate thereby making causal relationships less stable and replication difficult. As Table 20 shows, standard error estimates of the structural parameter coefficients are reasonable, suggesting the study's results are not hampered by suppression effects.

In addition to these checks, and given that previous scholars conceptualize improvisation as multi-dimensional but tend to include its summed measure in structural models (e.g., Vera & Crossan, 2005), the possibility of interactions between the two dimensions was examined. Single indicants of salesperson creativity and salesperson spontaneity were computed, mean-centered and then used to generate a multiplicative term which was included in a regression model (Aiken et al.,1991). According to Appendix 5E, there is no evidence of a possible interaction between salesperson creativity and salesperson spontaneity in predicting sales performance ($\gamma = -.01$; $t = -.21$; $p = .83$).

**5.12.2 Quadratic effects of salesperson improvisation dimensions**

The researcher also explored the possibility that the two dimensions of salesperson improvisation self-moderate; one could argue that either of the two dimension may have a quadratic relationship with sales performance. For instance, though creativity is thought to exert a positive influence on sales success (Agnihotri et al., 2013; Lassk & Shepherd, 2013), others argue that it is inherently disruptive (Ferguson, 2009) and the uncertainty surrounding it may be unsettling for customers (Mueller, Melwani, & Goncalo, 2011). Similarly, even though this study argues that spontaneity drives sales success by enabling timely responsiveness, its impulsive underpinnings means that it could lead to haphazard and imprudent choices (Taute & McQuitty, 2004).

Accordingly given the non-significant relationships uncovered between the dimensions of salesperson improvisation and sales performance, the study explored, *ex post*, the possibility that these dimensions have quadratic elements. Squared terms of the composites of salesperson creativity and spontaneity (mean-centered) were regressed on sales performance (See Table 21).

Results are consistent with the initial findings of H4a and H4b confirming that, by themselves, neither salesperson creativity nor spontaneity is significantly related to sales performance. Both quadratic terms (of creativity and spontaneity) returned non-significant path coefficients ($\gamma = .06$; $t = .78$, $p = .43$; $\gamma = .00$, $t = .03$; $p = .97$ respectively). As such, this refutes any arguments that the dimensions of salesperson improvisation self-moderate in their relationship with sales performance.

**Table 21 Quadratic effects of salesperson creativity and spontaneity**

| Predictors | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 4.11 | .42 | | 9.75 | .00 |
| Industry type | -.08 | .11 | -.05 | -.74 | .45 |
| Compensation type | .02 | .02 | .05 | .83 | .40 |
| Adaptive selling behaviour | .17 | .07 | .16 | 2.30 | .02 |
| Creativity | -.09 | .06 | -.11 | -1.43 | .15 |
| Spontaneity | .13 | .08 | .17 | 1.74 | .08 |
| Creativity$^2$ | .02 | .03 | .05 | .78 | .43 |
| Spontaneity$^2$ | .00 | .03 | .00 | .03 | .97 |
| *Dependent variable: sales performance* | | | | | |

### 5.12.3 Additional insights on interaction effects

Following the findings on moderation effects, the nature of the effects at differing levels of resource availability, pressure to perform and individual agency were plotted. Following Aiken and West (1991), the relationships between (a) salesperson creativity, (b) salesperson spontaneity and sales performance were plotted above and below mean levels (one standard deviation above and below mean levels) of the three contingency variables.

As shown in Figures 4 and 5, salesperson creativity increases in value as the level of resource availability increases and vice versa. However, it does not matter the extent of resource availability when salespersons apply spontaneous improvisatory responses. In Figures 6, it is evident that performance pressures make little difference to the creativity–performance link. However, while low pressure, accompanied by high spontaneity boosts sales output, Figure 7 shows that the opposite is true of high levels pressure and spontaneity. Finally, in Figures 8 and 9, at low agency levels and low creativity, sales performance is on a growth trajectory. This changes, as the levels of agency and creativity increase together. Not much of a distinction is apparent in the effect of agency relative to the spontaneity- performance relationship.

**Figure 4 Moderating role of Resource on creativity-performance link**
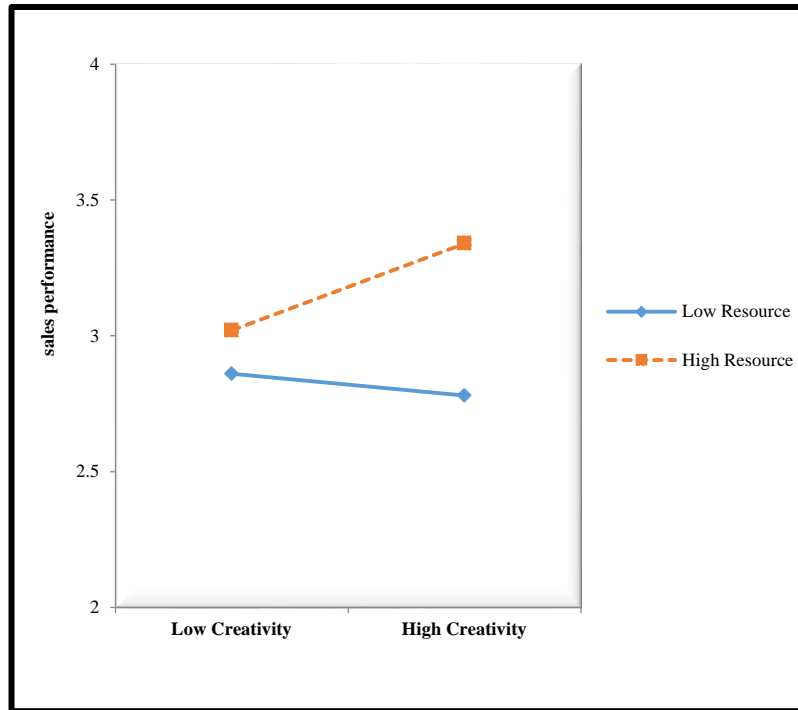
**Figure 5 Moderating role of Resource on spontaneity-performance link**
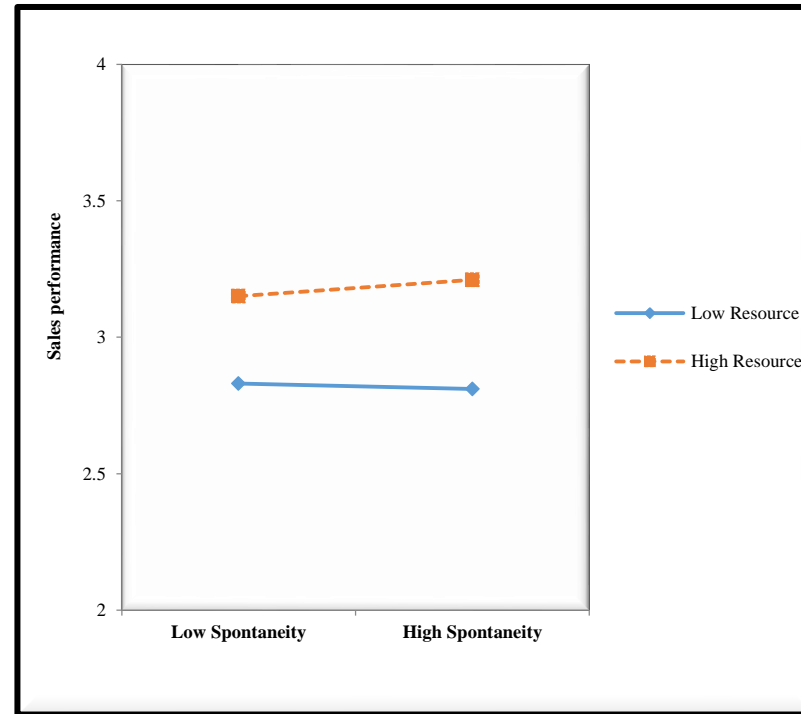
**Figure 6 Moderating role of Pressure on creativity-performance link**
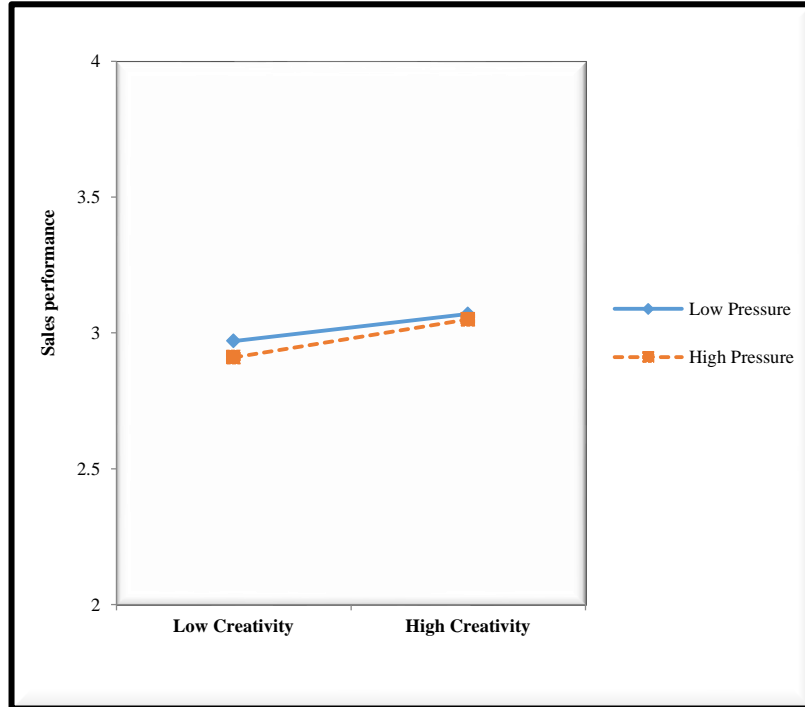


**Figure 7 Moderating role of Pressure on spontaneity-performance link**
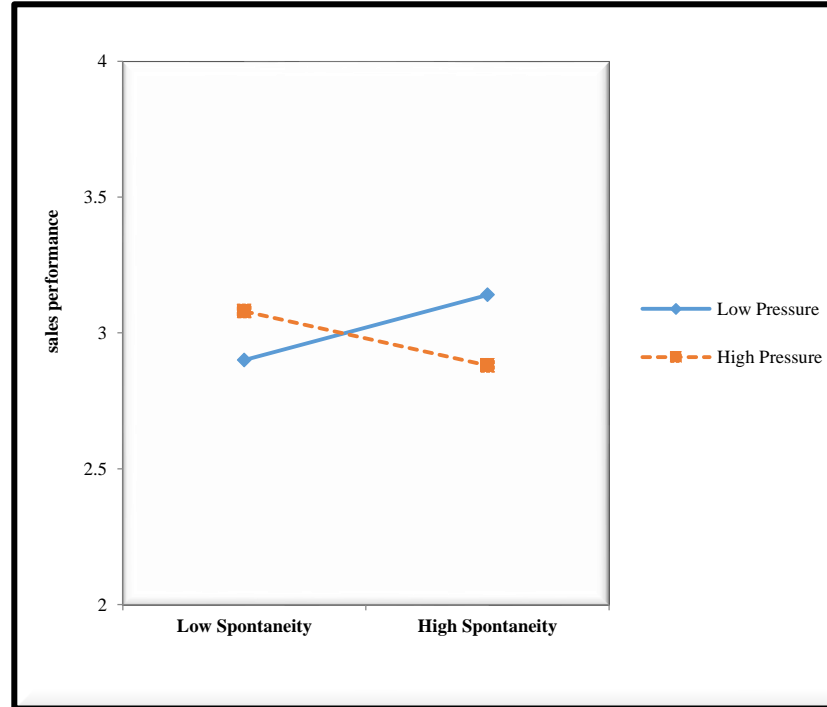
**Figure 8 Moderating role of Agency on creativity-performance link**
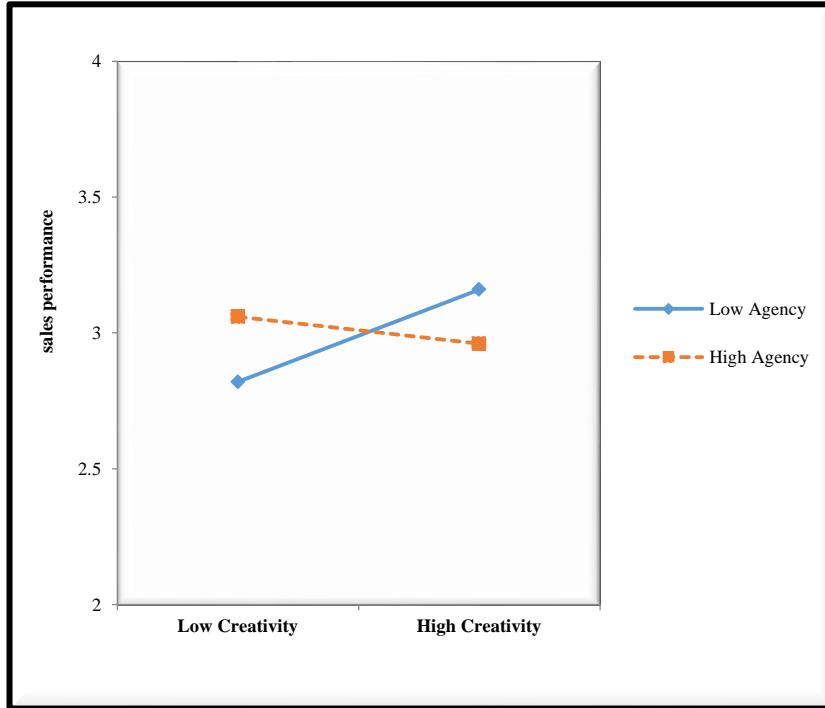


**Figure 9 Moderating role of Agency on creativity-performance link**
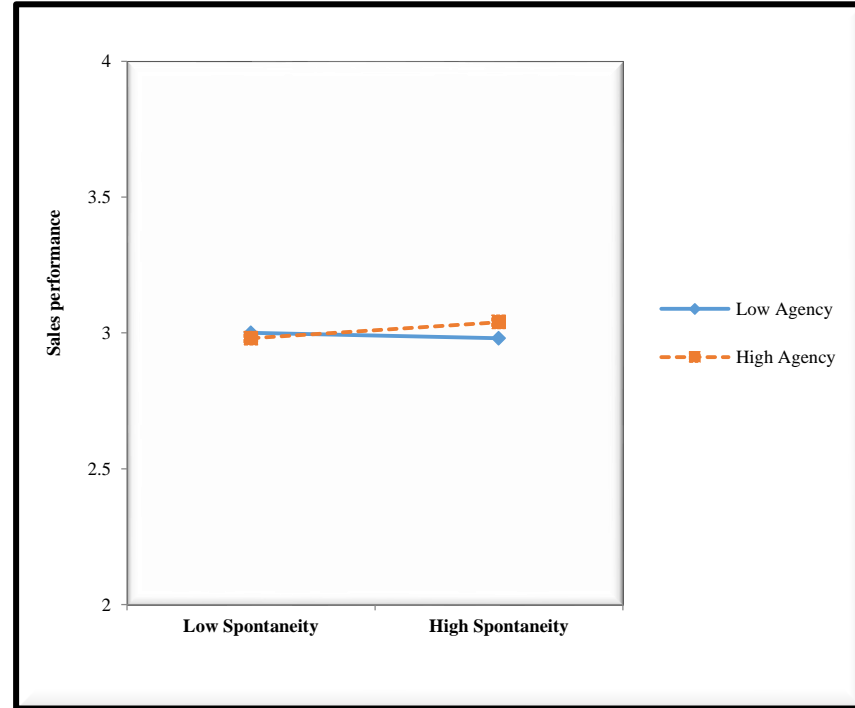
**5.13 Chapter summary**

This chapter has been devoted to reporting the results of the empirical analysis. It presents the processes followed in validating the measures developed. Individual items and scales are assessed for their validity, reliability and other key criteria. In all cases, the analysis assures that the scales developed provide good measurement of the constructs. In addition, the analytical approach adopted in hypotheses testing (SUR) is also discussed and justification provided for its choice.

# CHAPTER 6

## DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Chapter overview

This concluding chapter of the thesis presents a discussion of the findings. The study's implications for theory as well as practitioner insights are the main issues of focus. The chapter begins with an overview of the key findings as they situate within the existing knowledge and how they relate to the study's objectives. Following this, the study's implications for theory and practice are discussed. Lastly, drawing from limitations of the study, suggestions are given for a future research agenda.

### 6.2 Discussion of findings

In industrial sales scholarship, there is growing attention to firms' need to develop market response capabilities to timeously respond to evolving customer needs and competitive moves (Helm & Gritsch, 2014). As boundary personnel, salespersons are key to firms developing such a capability (Lambert et al., 1990). They have access to customers' latent and articulated needs as well as competitive intelligence, both of which are critical to formulating responsive strategies (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004).

However, fast-paced competition and rising customer power means firms cannot always afford to wait for market intelligence to plan market response strategies. Customers want solutions delivered when it matters to them (Backhouse & Burns, 1999). This, along with the fact industrial clients themselves face market pressure (Nijssen & Frambach, 2000) and often have complex and unique needs (Jackson &

Cooper, 1988; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004) means that the industrial selling process cannot always be planned ahead. Rather, often, firms must rely on salespersons to devise timely solutions to unexpected but urgent customer problems. To do this, salespersons must think and act on their feet when faced with unexpected and urgent sales situations (Yeboah Banin, 2016). In other words, sales success is increasingly predicated on the ability to improvise solutions to customers' emergent problems.

While several emergent behaviours have surfaced in the sales literature (see Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2003; Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004), what happens when situations require salespersons to improvise remains unexplored. Importantly, it is unclear whether there is any value to salespersons' improvisational behaviour and whether any factors exist to alter its incidence and consequences. Against this background, this study set out to (i) introduce the notion of salesperson improvisation to the sales literature, (ii) develop a measure of the construct for future academic engagement, and (iii) provide an empirical testing of its nomological network.

In doing so, the study makes several contributions to the extant literature that may be of interest to both academics and practitioners. Significantly, this study lays the foundation for future scholarly engagement of the salesperson improvisation construct. It develops a measure of salesperson improvisation as a multi-dimensional construct constituted by salesperson creativity and salesperson spontaneity. This presents opportunity for future empirical investigations on the construct. For practice, the measure developed could be useful for training and assessment purposes.

Another contribution of this study lies in its application of novel theory to the sales management literature. The study's use of the descriptive decision-making theory expounds an alternative mechanism connecting emergent salesperson behaviour to sales performance. Hitherto, sales scholarship has tended to emphasize rational planning and market information processing, and optimization (March, 2006). By introducing the descriptive decision logic, this study highlights alternative routes to selling predicated on attention to context, heuristics and satisficing behaviours. This contribution is critical as recent sales scholarship calls for the development of selling models that account for the nuances in specific sales situation types (Singh & Koshy, 2010).

By applying improvisation to the sales context, the study also extends the construct's reach beyond the organizational level and brings clarity to the ambiguities surrounding its value. Previous studies, situated mainly at organizational or unit levels, have operationalized the construct as uni-dimensional and concluded with equivocal findings (Kyriakopoulos, 2011; Nemkova et al., 2012; Samra et al., 2008; Vera & Crossan, 2005).

The dimension–outcome analysis strategy adopted here enables a more nuanced engagement with the construct by showing how the conflicting findings on the improvisation–performance link are shaped. Importantly, it helps to show that the dimensions of (salesperson) improvisation (i.e. creativity and spontaneity) may perform differing roles in shaping its effectiveness. This is fundamental to any effort to leverage any benefits of improvisation in the sales domain.

This study is also the first to examine the antecedents and boundary conditions of improvisation in the personal selling context. By examining the antecedent roles of self-efficacy, experience and autonomy, and the conditioning effects of resource availability, pressure to perform and individual agency, the study shows how improvisation can be manipulated. For instance, understanding that resource availability renders improvisation positive while performance pressures render it negative presents opportunity for managers to leverage its benefits and avoid its dark sides.

Finally, by testing the research model in an emerging economy context, the study brings rare evidence on the applicability of constructs validated in global northern economies. Research on emerging market selling processes is scarce (Panagopoulos et al., 2011). This, along with the fact that improvisational selling behaviour may be conditioned by enabling infrastructure (e.g., communication channels and regulatory discipline; (Sheth, 2011)), ensures the study's emerging economy setting enriches existing sales scholarship. The following sections highlight the key aspects of this rare evidence.

### 6.2.1 Drivers of salesperson improvisation

Given theoretical assertions that improvisation is a double-edged sword presenting both positive and negative outcomes (Moorman & Miner, 1998a), a legitimate issue is understanding its antecedents. This would bring both scholars and practitioners a step closer to being able to manipulate it. Driven thus, this study identified three factors that are critical to improvisation. Following the decomposed strategy adopted, the section that follows discusses the nature of the relationship between each driver and the two dimensions of salesperson improvisation.

**6.2.1.1 Salesperson self-efficacy**

At the point where individuals must decide whether to respond to unexpected events or walk away from them, behaviour motivation theories suggest that their capability assessments are key to their eventual decision and response (Bandura, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). To that extent, faced with situations that require salespersons to deviate from existing strategy, a key consideration is the extent of their self-efficacy.

Accordingly, this study examined the possibility that self-efficacy is critical to the incidence or otherwise of salesperson improvisation. Specifically, the study hypothesized self-efficacy as being positively related to both creativity and spontaneity during improvisation (H1a and H1b). H1a was supported by the data ($\gamma$ = .30, $t$ = 3.50 $p<.01$). However, the study failed to find support for H1b. Contrary to the hypothesized positive relationship between self-efficacy and spontaneity, the parameter estimate is negative and significant ($\gamma$ = -.20, $t$ = -2.24, $p<.05$) indicating a negative relationship. As such, the study finds that while self-efficacy is associated with increased creativity during improvisation, the opposite is true of its implications for spontaneity.

The latter finding is an interesting departure from expectations given that the literature presents high efficacy as an impetus to action rather than a deterrent (Brown, Jones & Leigh, 2005). As such, this finding suggests a need to pay closer attention to the efficacy construct relative to the specific context of exigency and surprise. Is it possible that high efficacy activates complacency such that salespersons facing exigency adopt a relaxed attitude which delays their response time? That is, assuming their assessment of the situation assures them of their

capability to effectively resolve it, does this assurance serve a 'calming effect' on their reaction?

With regards to the affirmative results of H1a, the study reasons that self-efficacy stimulates a drive to reach for creative unconventional solutions to resolve unexpected and urgent situations. As Bandura (1997) and Amabile (1996) suggest, creative behaviour is necessarily a product of a can-do attitude. The finding is also supported by the received wisdom on the concept of creative self-efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2011) suggesting it as the source of the internal sustenance to persevere in the face of challenge.

With respect to creativity as a descriptive behaviour, self-efficacy may also activate the cognitive resources (e.g. memory search to identify applicable stored experiences) relevant to the situation (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Efficacy also drives the search for cues nested within the situation that have solution potential (Tierney & Farmer, 2002).

**6.2.1.2 Salesperson experience as a driver of salesperson improvisation**

Drawing on the logic that improvisation as descriptive behaviour relies heavily on intuition and heuristics, one expects experience to play a key role. This is because experience presents the basket of tools, both declarative and procedural memory (Moorman & Miner, 1997), from which heuristics may be drawn. As such, the study specified, in H2a, that salesperson experience is positively related to salesperson creativity during improvisation. The data rejects this hypothesis ($\gamma = -.02$, $t = -.72$, *n.s.*), failing to support extant empirical knowledge (Agnihotri et al., 2009; Fu, 2009; Lassk & Shepherd, 2013). The study speculates that this may be due to experienced

salespersons showing a tendency towards avoiding new tasks with which they are unfamiliar (Atuahene-Gima, 1997).

In accordance with H2b, however, experience weakens spontaneous responses during improvisation *(γ = -.06, t = -2.50, p<.05)*. As such, the study finds that experienced salespersons are less spontaneous when improvising. One reason may be that experience is a harbinger of habit (Cron, 1984). As such, having 'been there, seen that, done that', and developing a sense of how things are always done (Fu, 2009), experienced salespersons may suffer reduction in their reaction time (Robinson et al., 2005; Strutton et al., 2009).

With regards to conclusions warranted by these findings, it appears that more experienced salespersons may be worse-off in initiating improvisatory responses. Not only do they become less creative, but their response time also decreases. By this, the study does not suggest that firms operating in exigency-prone contexts should avoid experienced salespersons altogether. Such salespersons have their value (Franke & Park, 2006; Fu, 2009). However, it might be worthwhile to regularly activate the need for timely responsiveness in their minds.

### 6.2.1.3 Salesperson autonomy as a driver of salesperson improvisation

This study finds that salesperson autonomy amplifies their creativity and spontaneity when improvising responses to unexpected and urgent situations. Supporting H3a (γ = .42, *t* = 6.35, *p*<.01) and H3b *(γ = .30, t = 4.33, p<.01)* respectively, the finding shows that when salespersons have decision-making power (Ahearne et al., 2005), they are better driven to attempt responsive measures to exigent situations.

Autonomy acts as a license with which they are free examine the unique demands of situations and generate relevant creative and spontaneous responses.

As descriptive behaviours, both creativity and spontaneity require attention to context and the ability to intuitively deviate from planned strategy where necessary (Kunreuther et al., 2002: Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). Where such ability is denied salespersons by requiring them to check their every move with supervisors, this study finds that salespersons would be stifled in their ability to improvise.

Secondly, because autonomy activates ego involvement (Deci & Ryan, 1987), autonomous salespersons facing exigent situations would be driven to 'save the day', to justify their decision power (Deci & Ryan, 1987; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). As such, as autonomy increases, one can expect a corresponding increase in creativity and spontaneity, as salespersons strive to go the 'extra mile' to win over situations (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Literature linking autonomy to customer-oriented selling lends support to this finding. It suggests that as salespersons' sense of autonomy increases, so does their tendency to take emergent actions towards customer satisfaction (Martin & Bush, 2006; Wotruba, 1996). Abstracted to this study, it implies that where time is of the essence, autonomous salespersons would take spontaneous action if they believe this would enable them satisfy their customers. Managers working in markets frequently faced with exigency may, therefore, consider ceding more decision-making power to their salespersons to enable the latter adopt improvisatory responsive behaviours.

**6.2.2 Consequence and boundaries of salesperson improvisation**

Within the larger organizational analysis literature, there is ongoing controversy regarding the value of improvisation by organizational members. Moorman and Miner's (1998a) seminal test of improvisation in marketing found that, by itself, is not universal in its benefits. Rather, it acts as a double-edged sword. Similarly, Tjornehoj and Mathiassen (2010) found that improvisation could lead to both positive and negative outcomes.

This ambivalence is re-echoed in the opposing findings by Samra et al. (2008) and Kyriakopoulos (2011). While Samra et al. (2008) found that improvisation improved new product cycle time and launch success, Kyriakopoulos (2011) found direct negative effect on new product performance. In other contexts, Hmieleski and Corbett (2008) also found that improvisational behaviour was not, by itself, directly related to new venture performance. Within the export context, Nemkova et al. (2012) have suggested that improvisation increases sales effectiveness by enabling responsiveness. However, in a recent empirical study, these authors found that while it is related to export responsiveness, this does not translate into economic performance (Nemkova et al., 2015).

At the sub-organizational level, while few empirical studies have tested improvisation, the literature displays similar inconsistencies. For instance, while Vera and Crossan (2005) found no obvious effects of improvisation on team innovation, Daly et al. (2009) found that it enhanced service employees' confidence and adaptability. Hmielski and Corbett (2006), and Cunha, Rego and Kamoche

(2009) have also reported improvisation to be highly related to entrepreneurial intentions and feelings of transcendence respectively.

On the face of it, the fact that the studies outlined above examine improvisation relative to different outcomes suggests a comparison of apples and oranges. However, the sheer consistency in the contradictions surrounding its effects highlights the need for a closer look. This study argues that deeper insight into the foundations of these inconsistencies lies in disentangling improvisation to its basic elements. If, as frequently suggested, improvisation is multifaceted (e.g. Nemkova et al., 2015; Vera & Crossan, 2005), then it is possible that the equivocal findings are driven by differing dimensional effects.

As such, in seeking to bring clarity to the improvisation literature, the two dimensions of salesperson improvisation were each examined for their unique contributions to sales performance. The study found that neither dimension, by itself, is significantly related to sales performance (creativity: $\gamma = -.04$, $t = -.75$, *n.s.*; spontaneity: $\gamma = .03$, $t = .64$, *n.s.*). This gives credence to existing theory suggesting that, by itself, improvisation may not be dramatic in its effects, tending rather to be effective by the activation of contingencies (Hmieleski & Corbett, 2008; Moorman & Miner, 1998a; Vera & Crossan, 2005).

Importantly, however, the study finds that the direction of effects differ for each dimension. While salesperson creativity during improvisation appears to be negatively related to sales performance, the reverse is true for spontaneity. While the effects are insignificant and, therefore, impede clear conclusions, their differential

direction suggests possible reasons for the ambivalence surrounding the construct. According to Moorman and Miner (1998a), improvisation is best understood as having both positive and negative properties. This study's findings validate this assertion. In this sense, the findings replicate Nemkova et al (2015) who found that improvisation's dimensions acted differently in their effects. They report a strong association between taking action when it matters and customer performance, and a weak one between creativity and customer performance.

From these findings, the study speculates the possibility that in those instances where improvisation is reportedly positive (e.g. Samra et al., 2008), such effects may have been driven by higher levels of spontaneity in the improvisation process. In contrast, studies reporting negative improvisation effects (e.g. Kyriakopoulos, 2011) may have been characterised by higher levels of creativity.

Abstracted to the salesperson, this finding implies that under unexpected and urgent conditions, improvisation does not necessarily add much value to their sales success. This is because while the study specifies that creativity (H4a) and spontaneity (H4b) in such situations yields performance benefits, this is not supported by the data. However, H4a and H4b are nested within the higher-order structural paths (H5a, b; H6a, b and H7a, b). As such, support for relevant higher order arguments also provide support for the main effects hypothesized for creativity and spontaneity (see Yeboah Banin et al., 2016).

### 6.2.2.1 The moderating role of resource availability

Because H5a and H5b specify positive effects of salesperson creativity and spontaneity (respectively) given high levels of resource availability, support for these

hypotheses also provide support for H4a and H4b (see Yeboah Banin et al., 2016). Since the study uncovers support for a positive and significant relationship between creativity and performance when resources are high ($\gamma = .10$; $t = 2.09$; $p < 0.05$), the nested H4a receives support. To that extent, the study finds that resource availability gives salespersons the incentive to bring their creative ideas to fruition (Bonney & Williams, 2009), expanding the opportunity to satisfy customers and reap sales dividends.

With resource adequacy too, salespersons may not need to search too far 'out of the box' for creative solutions, tempering the risks and uncertainty associated with such creativity (Ferguson, 2009). It is also possible that while creativity itself may be disruptive (Ferguson, 2009), resource availability imbues improvising salespersons with confidence which, in consequence, may engender customer trust in their creative solutions (Mueller et al., 2011). Lastly, it is possible that improvising creative solutions in the face of resource adequacy reduces the risk of imperfect solutions that do not satisfy customers (Baker & Nelson, 2005).

In contrast to expectation, however, H5b fails to be supported, thereby, failing to provide support to its corresponding nested hypothesis, H4b. The perception of resource availability while deploying spontaneous responses is not significantly related to sales performance. In fact, the parameter estimate ($\gamma = .02$; $t = .27$; *n.s.*) shows a slight reduction in that returned for the main effect of salesperson spontaneity ($\gamma = .03$, $t = .44$, *n.s.*).

This defies existing logic that resources provide the impetus for initiating action (Cunha et al., 2014). However, borrowing insights from Nohria and Gulati (1996), it appears that resource availability reduces self-discipline when applying spontaneity. According to them, resource abundance is associated with increased tendency towards experimentation and high risk decisions. As such, it may be possible that the impulsive tendency embedded in spontaneity (Davelaar et al., 2008) becomes heightened with high resource levels, exposing improvising salespersons to risky experimentation with *ad hoc* choices.

Nohria and Gulati (1996) also suggest that resource slack reduces managers' drive for intense negotiations, suggesting that highly resourced salespersons applying spontaneity may not necessarily strive for value from the situation. This means that resources may be applied in exchange for little value, reducing the overall financial benefits of resulting sales (Jaramillo & Mulki, 2008).

Accordingly, firms seeking to leverage any benefits of salesperson improvisation need to achieve the right balance in the resources made available to salespersons. While high resource render creativity effective, it does not do much to enhance spontaneity during improvisation. Thus, rather than encouraging salespersons to aim for blanket creative and spontaneous responses to exigency, attention should go towards the right balance of resources. This is so that improvising salespersons are not too under-resourced as to fail to employ creativity nor over-resourced to tend towards haphazard *ad hoc* measures.

### 6.2.2.2 The moderating role of pressure to perform

This study specified negative effects of pressure to perform in conditioning the relationship between salesperson improvisation and sales performance. Similar to the pattern of effects reported, pressure to perform differentiates in its effects. The non-significant relationship between salesperson creativity and sales performance ($\gamma$ = -.04, $t$ = -.75, *n.s.*) appears immune to the moderating influence of performance pressures ($\gamma$ = .01; $t$ =.21; *n.s.*). On the other hand, pressure to perform alters the positive insignificant spontaneity–performance relationship ($\gamma$ = .03, $t$ = .64, *n.s.*) to a negative and significant one ($\gamma$ = -.09; $t$ =-*1.93*; $p$ <0.10).

Going by the nested hypothesis argument, these findings suggest that pressure makes little different to the outcomes of salespersons' creative efforts when improvising. In contrast, the spontaneous element of salesperson improvisation becomes dangerous when salespersons are under pressure. With regards to the former, it is reasoned that perhaps creative inertia may be responsible. That is, given extreme performance pressure, salespersons may lose their sense of instrumentality and become less creative (Jones et al., 2007). The loss in the creative drive then reduces any dangers inherent in creativity which may have accounted for the negative nonsignificant effect of H4a.

Drawing from stress theorists, it is suggested that pressure to perform presents as stress which hampers creativity as salespersons are forced to devote mental resources to it, leaving little cognitive space for creativity (Byron, Khazanchi, & Nazarian, 2010). Thus, pressured salespersons may have a lower tendency for creativity and,

therefore, at lower risk of its disruptive nature (Ferguson, 2009; Ford & Sullivan, 2004) and the possible customer apprehension it generates (Mueller et al., 2011).

As hypothesized, pressure to perform negatively alters the positive nonsignificant relationship between salesperson spontaneity and sales performance, supporting H6b. Spontaneity being impulsive (Taute & McQuitty, 2004), performance pressure may heighten its tendencies towards 'snap shot' reaction. Thus, their use of time in resolving exigency may be reduced (Rastegary & Landy, 1993; Verplanken, 1993).

In that sense, pressured salespersons applying spontaneity risk failure to stay in situations long enough to resolve them. This is consistent with Dror, Basola, and Busemeyer (1999) who found that individuals spend lesser time responding to situations when they perceive themselves to be under pressure. It may also be that, under high pressure, improvising salespersons resort to spontaneous coercive tactics (McFarland, 2003) and unethical short cuts (Robertson & Rymon, 2001). Together, these may reduce customer trust (Boyle & Dwyer, 1995) and subsequent sales purchases (McFarland, 2003).

Consequently, it is concluded from this that managers seeking to leverage any benefits of improvisation among their salespersons need to be mindful of the pressure cues communicated to them. To the extent that pressure to perform turns spontaneity into a threat, managers should be careful how they communicate bottom-line pressures to their sales teams.

**6.2.2.3 The moderating role of individual agency**

The study finds that, as hypothesized, a strong dispositional agency worsens the implications of creativity during improvisation. The negative non-significant relationship between creativity and sales performance ($\gamma = -.04$, $t = -.75$, *n.s.*) assumes significance with high individual agency ($\gamma = -.11$; $t = -2.30$; $p < 0.05$) supporting H7a. In contrast, the negative moderating role of individual agency over the spontaneity–performance relationship (H7b) is not statistically supported ($\gamma = .01$; $t = .33$; *n.s.*). However, this finding corroborates the researcher's general expectations. Although the spontaneity–performance relationship did not assume an obvious negative tone in the face of high agency, there is a slight reduction in the parameter estimate (from $\gamma = .03$ to $\gamma = .01$ respectively).

High agency individuals are preoccupied with the fit between their behaviours and personal goals (Solberg et al., 1995). Where situations demand deviations from envisaged plans, misfit may be perceived between intended goals and the situation (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). As a result, high agency individuals may tend towards contextual inflexibility. In addition, this condition may provoke off-task thoughts (Martin & Tesser, 1996) and reduce the focus needed for creative ideation and spontaneous action (Brown, Jones & Leigh, 2005).

Given the criticality of time in achieving responsiveness (Backhouse & Burns, 1999), such tendencies thwart salespersons' ability to be responsive, engendering sales losses (Franke & Park, 2006; Nemkova et al., 2015). This line of thinking is consistent with early suggestions that focusing evaluative attention on performance

processes hampers the outcomes of such performance (see Baumeister, 1984; Martens & Landers, 1972).

Form the foregoing, it is concluded that salespersons with high dispositional agency may need to tone down their intentionality and in-behaviour self-reflectiveness to leverage any benefits of improvisation. While a self-drive towards goal attainment and in-behaviour self-evaluation may be healthy in some situations (Bandura, 2001), this study shows that in exigency-laden contexts, it portends more harm than good. Thus, it takes those salespersons with an open attitude towards to emergent choice, flexibility in goal attainment and an ability to moderate their real-time self-evaluation to leverage the benefits of improvisation.

## 6.3 Research purpose and questions revisited

The purpose of the study was to contribute to extant sales and improvisation literatures on (1) how salespersons improvise; (2) its effects and any differential implications of its dimensions; and (3) its drivers and boundary conditions. From the findings uncovered from the hypotheses tests, the following are provided as answers to the initial research purpose and the accompanying research questions.

At the basic level, although not formally hypothesized, this study's findings suggests that:

- ❖ Salesperson improvisation comprises of salesperson creativity and spontaneity when responding to exigency and surprise.

Relative to hypothesized research questions, the study finds that:

❖ *The dimensions of salesperson improvisation are not directly related to sales performance. However, they appear to have differential implications with creativity tending towards the negative and spontaneity tending towards positive.*

❖ *Salesperson self-efficacy, experience and autonomy are all related to salesperson spontaneity during improvisation. However, only self-efficacy and autonomy are related to salesperson creativity during improvisation.*

❖ *Resource availability activates the creativity–performance link. However, it has no moderating influence over the spontaneity–performance link.*

❖ *Pressure to perform increases the odds that improvising salespersons suffer sales losses (rather than gain sales success) as a consequence of their spontaneous responses. It makes little difference to the consequences of creative responses to unexpected and urgent situations.*

❖ *Individual agency has a negative conditioning role over the relationship between salesperson creativity during improvisation and sales performance. However, it has no obvious effect on the spontaneity–performance link.*

## 6.4 Study implications

This section delineates the implications of the study findings for both theory and practice. First theoretical and methodological implications are discussed followed by the practice and policy implications.

## 6.4.1 Implications for theory

This study's implications for theory development are manifold. It finds that the dimensions of salesperson improvisation are not, by themselves, significant drivers of sales performance and that they differentiate in their relationships with it. Salesperson creativity tends towards the negative while spontaneity has a weak positive association with sales performance. These findings have clear implications for the improvisation literature, namely, the opportunity for clarifying ambiguities surrounding the construct's value (Moorman & Miner, 1998a; Vera & Crossan, 2005). On the one end of the continuum are studies suggesting improvisation as an

asset (Nemkova et al., 2012; Samra et al., 2008). On the other, improvisation is presented as dangerous (Hmieleski & Corbett, 2008; Kyriakopoulos, 2011).

Arguing that a nuanced analytical approach is key to resolving the ambiguous evidence, this study conceptualised improvisation as two-dimensional and applied a decomposed analysis (Nemkova et al., 2015) to untangle underlying properties. As anticipated, this strategy uncovers differential potentials in each dimension. Spontaneity may be beneficial while creativity may be hurtful. As such, the study views the decomposed analytical approach adopted as a useful next step for improvisation scholarship if the construct is to be understood and effectively leveraged.

Relative to the sales literature, while creative and adaptive behaviours are validated as critical to performance (Evans, McFarland, Dietz, & Jaramillo, 2012; Wang & Miao, 2015; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004), they do not, by themselves, tap the exigent and uncertain context of the contemporary selling. This study shows that with the right balance of resources, salesperson improvisation may be key in such contexts. However, given that the dimensions of salesperson improvisation do not have direct implications for sales performance, the study highlights a need to intensify the ongoing search for relevant emergent salespersons behaviours that fit specific situation types (Singh & Koshy 2010).

Importantly, the negative insignificant path from creativity to performance in the face of existing contrary evidence (Agnihotri et al., 2013; Sousa & Coelho, 2011; Wang & Miao, 2015), suggests the need to re-examine established constructs relative

to the evolving personal selling context. As Shalley, Zhou and Oldham (2004, p. 952) suggest, creativity may have "negative, unintended consequences… that offset any possible benefits". This study's findings corroborate such a position.

This study also establishes the descriptive decision-making logic as a plausible alternative lens for understanding salespersons' emergent behaviours. The theory is particularly suited to the contemporary personal selling context which Wang and Netemeyer (2004) argue is beset with situational ambiguity requiring contextual choice modification. By highlighting the roles of intuition, heuristics and context cues, the descriptive decision logic enables understanding of how salesperson emergent behaviours are formed and their consequences shaped. In applying this theory, therefore, this study moves sales scholarship a step away from the planning-based approaches that dominate it (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005).

This study's examination of the antecedents and boundary conditions shaping the dimensions of salesperson improvisation also has key implications for theory in two broad disciplines. Both sales and improvisation literatures have, hitherto, not examined the construct in the personal selling context. Previous sales scholarship fails to isolate the exigency and surprise context of contemporary selling. Improvisation literature, on the other hand, has mainly engaged the construct at firm, unit and group levels, creating a dearth in our knowledge of the drivers, outcomes and boundaries of individual improvisation. By merging the two bodies of knowledge, this study lays the foundations for future cross-discipline scholarly contributions.

The empirical contribution made by testing the theoretical model in a developing economy context is also highlighted. Especially in the case of the sales literature, this empirical contribution fulfils a crucial need for closing the knowledge gap between developed and emerging markets selling practices (Panagopoulos et al., 2011). This study brings rare evidence to both the sales and improvisation literatures while also justifying the ecological validity of established global-north constructs such as improvisation. At the same time, the evidence presented also challenges the universal applicability of other constructs such as creativity. The findings uncovered suggest that not only may the consequences of creativity differ across geographical contexts, but that they may also differentiate across different sales situation types.

### 6.4.2 Implications for managers and policy makers

Several managerial and policy implications can be drawn from the findings uncovered in this study. First, the seven-item measure of salesperson improvisation tapping its dimensions is a practical tool with utility for both assessment and training purposes. Sales managers dealing with exigency and surprise-laden markets can employ the instrument to assess or enhance the extent of their sales team members' improvisational responses. Importantly, however, the finding that improvisation does not necessarily drive performance means that sales managers need to be wary of blanket calls on their sales teams to improvise to exigent situations. As this study shows, while the dimensions are not directly related to sales performance, they also differentiate in their effects. Critically too, their effects assume significance with differing levels of resources, performance pressure and individual agency. This offers practical guides on what the focus should be when responding to exigency and surprise.

For instance, managers may enhance the value their salespersons' creativity in exigent situations by ensuring that relevant resources are available. On the other hand, because creativity assumes an overtly negative tone with high agency, it is a certain type of salesperson that should be encouraged to be creative when improvising. That is, those salespersons who are able to attain a flexible balance between the achievement of their personal goals/set targets, and their responsiveness to situational demands.

Regarding spontaneity, managers may need to watch out for the extent of performance pressure they communicate to salespersons. While pressure is integral to the sales role (Hansen & Riggle, 2009), this study shows that firms seeking to leverage spontaneous responsiveness may need to be cautious in how much they push the short-term performance agenda.

Lastly, this study's findings regarding the factors that occasion salesperson improvisational behaviour have utility for managers. It shows that self-efficacy is a crucial factor in engendering improvisational responses. As such, managers may employ training (Daly et al., 2009; Vera & Crossan, 2005) and empowering behaviours (Ahearne et al., 2005) to boost their sales team members' sense of job-related efficacy.

The study also points to autonomy as crucial to the incidence of improvisational responses. By granting salespersons more decision power, sales managers may see increased spontaneous responses. However, this need to be done in concert with reduced performance pressures to leverage any benefits in such spontaneous

responses. Autonomy should also go hand in hand with resources and an encouragement of salespersons to tone down their agency tendencies if the benefits of creativity during improvisation are to be realised.

This study also shows that managers need to watch out for the influence of salesperson experience. As experience increases, salespersons become less spontaneous in their improvisational responses. Without criticising experience, this finding implies that for firms in fast-paced markets, highly experienced salespersons may need to be regularly prompted to aim for timely responsiveness. However, to the extent that spontaneity is not strong in its benefits, attention should also go to performance pressures. In so doing the benefits of spontaneity would be strengthened without them taking a negative turn.

## 6.5 Study limitations and future research directions

Among the contributions highlighted in this study is the rare empirical evidence it brings from an emerging market context. However, within this contribution lies a limitation. While the rare evidence enriches both the sales and improvisation literatures, institutional differences between the developing and advanced economies (Sheth, 2011) presents challenges to the ecological validity of the findings. Future scholarly work in this area should explore the salesperson improvisation construct in global-northern economy settings. An even richer empirical contribution may lie in cross-economy comparative studies that test the applicability of the construct across differing empirical settings. Given that the theoretical model tested is conceived of as universal in its applicability, it would be interesting to find how it applies to varied empirical settings. The salesperson improvisation measure developed may prove instrumental in this endeavour.

Secondly, the use of subjective measures for sales performance denies this study the opportunity to emphatically delineate the sales performance outcomes of improvisation. Even though perceptual criterion measures are prevalent in recent sales scholarship (e.g. Wang & Miao, 2015), they are prone to method bias risks (Podsakoff et al., 2003). With this in mind, the researcher attempted but failed to gain objective performance data. As such, steps were taken to rule out the challenge of common method bias (see Section 5.7). However, to assure the validity of the findings, the ideal situation would be to test the research model using objective performance data.

Thirdly, the study's cross-sectional design also limits the opportunity for causal inferences. A possible future research avenue might be to approach the study from a longitudinal perspective by tracking relationships of interest over time to establish their stability.

Finally, while this study hopes to lay the foundation for future examination of improvisation among salespersons, it is impossible to establish the complete nomological network for the construct. Like many marketing constructs, improvisation might be related to other variables not examined in this study. In particular, given its emergent nature and conceptual closeness to adaptive selling behaviour, it might prove insightful to examine any relationships between the two. Other key variables of interest include competitive intensity, firm and salesperson market orientation and the salespersons' situational efficacy. It might also be

interesting to understand any links between salesperson improvisation and customer outcomes such as satisfaction and penalty for salesperson mistakes.

## 6.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has rounded up the study's findings, implications and contributions. It dwells on discussions in the preceding chapters to highlight the study's achievements and how these are situated within the literatures to which it lays claims of contribution. The chapter is also an opportunity for managers and policy makers to glean practical insights from the study. Given that this study cannot answer every question pertaining to salesperson improvisation, the chapter also highlights opportunities for future scholarly work.

Overall, the study reported in this thesis is an invitation for scholars, managers and sales executives to effectively address the nuances in the changing face of the sales situation. It throws light on the particular context of exigency and surprise and highlights salesperson improvisation as an important behavioural alternative. The study also examines the effects of such improvisational behaviour vis-à-vis the factors that both occasion and condition such effects.

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# APPENDICES

**Appendix 4A: Pre-test questionnaire**

# UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of how salespersons improvise when faced with unexpected, urgent situations for which they have no existing strategy. The success of the study rests on fully completed questionnaires, so please answer all questions. There are no right or wrong answers; what matters is that your fair opinions are provided. You may notice that some questions appear similar; please answer them anyway as this is deliberately done for statistical analysis purposes.

This questionnaire is about your work as a salesperson dealing with sales situations. The answers you provide should, therefore, be drawn from your reflections on such situations.

Please be assured that your responses would be treated with the strictest confidence; at no time would you or your company be identified in the results. Your participation in the study is voluntary and as such, should you feel unable to continue, please let us know.

## <u>GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE</u>

- This questionnaire may be completed by sales personnel who deal with or manage sales accounts with business clients (B2B). This may include sales managers and marketing managers who, themselves, keep and manage client accounts. If you feel you are not the right person to complete the questionnaire, we would appreciate your passing it on to more suitable colleagues.

- The questionnaire is organised in sections, each with an introduction explaining the answers we seek. Please take note of these; in particular please not that **section A is to be answered with unexpected, urgent sales situations in mind while section 'F' should be answered with the most recent situation in which you had to improvise in mind.**

- Each question has a set of statements and a list of numbered answer options. Please circle the number which best describes your response to the question.

**Once again, thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.**

Best Regards,

Abena Animwaa Yeboah
University of Leeds Business School
Leeds
United Kingdom
0244 528086
bnaay@leeds.ac.uk

**SECTION A**

This research is about how salespersons improvise in sales situations. When we say improvisation, we mean you having to think while acting. To answer the questions in this section, please cast your mind to instances when you encounter ***unexpected, urgent situations*** (problems/opportunities) for which you have no strategy (or plan) and, therefore, have to improvise *by **thinking** while acting.*

➤ **For each statement select *ONE* number that best suits your answer**

| *When dealing with unexpected, urgent situations for which there is no strategy...* | *Not at All* | | | | | | *To an extreme extent* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I figure out my responses as I go along | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I think and act on my feet | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I respond in the moment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I improvise my responses to the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I keep strictly to existing strategy even if it is not best suited to the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I wait till I have a plan for dealing with the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I identify new ways of responding | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| **When dealing with unexpected, urgent situations for which there is no strategy…** | *Not at All* | | | | | | *To an extreme extent* |
| I experiment with new approaches in performing my job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I generate creative ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I think out of the box | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I try to come up with fresh perspectives on old ways of doing things | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I try new approaches to problems | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I aim at originality in generating solutions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am inventive in overcoming barriers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I keep strictly to laid down strategy even if it is not best suited to the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| **When dealing with unexpected, urgent situations for which there is no strategy…** | *Not at All* | | | | | | *To an extreme extent* |
| I respond in the moment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I wait till I have painstakingly planned a response strategy before I act | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I deal with it on the spot | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I act spontaneously | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I respond impulsively | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My response to the situation tends to be held back by details | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I act 'on-the-spur-of-the-moment' | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I try to be reactive to the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| **When dealing with unexpected, urgent situations for which there is no strategy…** | *Not at All* | | | | | | *To an extreme extent* |
| I take action | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I postpone my response and action for another time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I become focused on dealing with the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I do not allow myself to get bogged down with details and procedure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I find it easy to get it over and done with | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| | Not at All | | | | | | To an extreme extent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have trouble getting down to work on the problem | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I don't have any problem getting started on leveraging the opportunity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I become action oriented | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I do nothing about it | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| **When dealing with unexpected, urgent situations for which there is no strategy…** | *Not at All* | | | | | | *To an extreme extent* |
| I try to find workable solutions by using our existing resources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I respond better than others with the same amount of resources would do | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I will not act until I have adequate resources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I work with what I have, hopeful that the final solution will be workable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I pause and try to assemble all the resources I need before responding | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I apply resources in ways for which they were not originally intended | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I think of different scenarios by recombining my available resources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| **When dealing with unexpected, urgent situations for which there is no strategy…** | *Not at All* | | | | | | *To an extreme extent* |
| I work closely with other persons/departments in my firm | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I consult with other departments, e.g. production/operations before taking action | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My performance is dependent on receivingaccurate information from others | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I work fairly independently of other people/departments in my firm | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I need to spend some my time talking to other people | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I rarely have to *obtain information* from others to complete my work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I make my own decisions with little need to coordinate with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I frequently must coordinate my efforts with others | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I consult with colleagues to ensure that I make decisions quickly but responsibly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

## SECTION B

This section captures **general** things about your work as a salesperson. You **do not** have to restrict your responses to your behaviours under unexpected, urgent situations.

➡ **For each statement select *ONE* number that best suits your answer**

| In my work… | Not at All | | | | | | To an extreme extent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have freedom in choosing actions to satisfy customers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I have freedom to develop my own sales strategies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am allowed the freedom to select my own sales tactics | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am allowed freedom to select my own problem solving actions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am free to develop appropriate actions towards meeting my personal targets | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am free to develop appropriate actions towards meeting my firm's goals | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I have to check with my supervisors before taking any action in the field | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I have a lot of flexibility in applying our sales strategies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I have autonomy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| In my work… | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
| I have enough resources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I have enough resources to be able to see my ideas through to fruition | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| I have access to a wide variety of resources for meeting customers' needs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have a lot of freedom in applying the firm's resources to satisfy customers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I feel confident in my firm's ability to provide me the resources I need to work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| The resources I have to work with are never enough | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my work…** | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I face a lot of pressure from management meet high sales targets | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My compensation is directly tied to my performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| If my sales targets were not met, I would be called to explain why | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I won't last long in this company if I fail to meet my targets | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| The sales targets set for me are not attainable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My job has a lot of visibility with senior members of my firm | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my work…** | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The customers I serve demand very high standards of quality | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My customers require a perfect fit between their needs and our offerings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| The customers I serve are very price sensitive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My customers have high expectations for after sales support | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My customers expect the highest levels of product and service quality. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my work…** | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Competition is cut-throat | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Anything that one competitor can offer, the others can readily match | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Price competition is a hallmark of our industry | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| One hears of new competitive moves very often | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Our competitors are relatively weak | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Our competitors are aggressively promoting special programs and products. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Our competitors are aggressively trying to increase market share. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my work…** | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| There are too many demands on my time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I have to do things that I don't have the time and energy for. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I need more hours in the day to do the things expected of me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| There are times when I can't meet everyone's expectations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I seem to have more commitments than some other sales persons I know. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I just can't find the energy to do all the things expected of me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my work…** | *Not at All* | | | | | | *To an extreme extent* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I tend to treat each customer as unique | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| When I feel that my sales approach is not working, I change to another approach | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I like to experiment with different sales approaches | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am very flexible in the selling approach I use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I feel that most buyers can be dealt with in pretty much the same manner | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I can easily use a wide variety of selling approaches | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am very sensitive to the needs of my customers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| In my work… | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My customers' preferences change frequently | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My customers are always on the lookout for good deals | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Customers change so frequently, it is difficult to profile the typical customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| New customers tend to have needs different from our existing customers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| The market I serve is generally stable and predictable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| **In my work…** | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
| Success depends on your performance relative to other salespeople. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Everybody is concerned with finishing at the top of the sales rankings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My co-workers frequently compare their results with mine | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My co-workers are not at all competitive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I get incentives (e.g. bonuses) to perform better than my co-workers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Getting positions (e.g. sales Manager) depend on performance relative to others | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My co-workers compete even in the absence of a reward | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| **In my work…** | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
| Salesperson creativity is encouraged | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Sales personnel are encouraged to be creative in solving customer problems | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Employee creativity is rewarded | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Employees must stick strictly to agreed ways of doing things all the time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This firm encourages everybody to think out of the box | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| We believe that creativity is too costly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Employees are encouraged to share their creative ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **SECTION C** |
|---|
| This section seeks general information about aspects of your predispositions and attitudes. Again, **you do not need to restrict** yourself to any particular type of selling situation. |
| ➡ **For each statement select *ONE* number that best suits your answer** |

| In my work… | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I like to have in mind a plan of things to do | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am very proactive in how I do my work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I tend to motivate myself to work towards my goals | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I actively keep myself on track to complete my plans | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| When completing tasks, I monitor my behaviour against my personal standards | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am conscious of my actions because they define my personal identity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| When completing tasks I am conscious of what I can and cannot do/handle | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| When completing tasks, I tend to evaluate the effectiveness of my choices | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| **In my work…** | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
| I feel confident in my ability to perform my job well | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I feel that I am good at understanding customer needs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am good at convincing other people | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I feel very capable of dealing with the demands of the sales job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel that I am very capable at the task of selling | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I feel I have the capabilities to successfully perform this job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I feel very capable of dealing effectively with job-related problems | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my work…** | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I enjoy competition with others | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| It is important for me to perform better than others on any task | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I try harder when I am in competition with other people | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I feel that winning is important in both work and games | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I don't mind if others do better than me, so long as I achieve my own standards | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I like to perform better than my co-workers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my work…** | *Strongly Agree* | | | | | | *Strongly Disagree* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall, I am satisfied with my work as a salesperson | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My work allows me to contribute meaningfully to my firm | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My work allows me to contribute meaningfully to my customers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| In this work, I feel like I am living my career dream | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My work gives me a sense of accomplishment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I find my work to be interesting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My job is often dull and monotonous | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

## SECTION D

This section seeks your own **FAIR** assessment of your performance. Please use the numbers below to do an assessment of your performance within the **LAST 12 MONTHS** and your projected performance for the **NEXT 12 MONTHS**

➤ **For each statement, indicate an answer for** *the last 12 months* **and the** *next 12 months*.

| **My performance in…** | **Last 12 Months** Much lower than target | | | | | | Much higher than target | **Projection for next 12 months** Much lower than target | | | | | | Much higher than target |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Meeting the sales targets assigned to me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Quickly generating sales of new company products | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Increasing market share for my company | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Selling products with higher profit margins | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Selling to large volume customers in my territory | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Making significant contribution to my firm's growth | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Meeting my customers' expectations/needs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Expanding share of business with major accounts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Earning profits in commissions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Earning mark ups on my sales transactions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Meeting my commission targets | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Increasing my take home pay | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| SECTION E |
| --- |
| This section seeks aspects of your job-related demographic characteristics. |

| **Please <u>choose one option</u> below to indicate which context you do most of your selling in** |
| --- |
| 1.   Domestic-based         2. Export-based 3. Both domestic and export |

| **Please write your answers in the space on your right** | |
| --- | --- |
| How many years of experience do you have in a sales job? | |
| How many years of experience do you have in your current company? | |
| How many years of experience do you have in your current territory? | |
| How many years of experience do you have in the current industry? | |

| **Please underline which industry mainly describes your firm** |
| --- |
| 1. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing     2.Mining and Quarrying     3.Manufacturing     4.Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Supply    5.Water Supply, Sewerage, Waste Management     6. Wholesale and Retail     7. Construction 8.Transportation and Storage     9.Accommodation and Food Service Activities     10.Information and Communication 11.Financial and Insurance Activities    12.Real Estate Activities  13. Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities |

| **Please circle the point (x) on the scale that best reflects how you are paid…** |
| --- |
| ***E.g. selecting the second 'x' means you earn 90% in salary and only 10% in commissions.*** |

% Salary

| 100% | 90 | 80 | 70 | 60 | 50 | 40 | 30 | 20 | 10 | 0% |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **X** | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | **X** |
| 0% | 10 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | 100% |

% Commission

## SECTION F

This section relates to the most recent situation in which you had to improvise. We would appreciate if you could cast your mind to that specific event and use it in answering the questions below.

| The last time I improvised… | Strongly Agree | | | | | | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I felt satisfied with my work as a salesperson | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt that I was contributing meaningfully to my firm | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt that I was contributing meaningfully to my customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt I was doing something meaningful with my life | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt a sense of accomplishment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt my work is interesting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt my job is often dull and monotonous | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| The last time I improvised… | Strongly Agree | | | | | | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I was able to generate sales for my products | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I was able to generate sales for products that the customer usually does not buy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I was able increase my share of business with the customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I was able to meet this customer's expectations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I achieved nothing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I was able to generate sales for high profit margin products | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

### The questions that follow relate to the customer with whom your most recent improvisation took place

| | Strongly Agree | | | | | | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| This customer can be relied upon to keep their promises. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| There is frequent and continuous interaction between me and this customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I find it necessary to be cautious in dealing with this customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Sometimes, I suspect this customer of withholding certain information | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I have a good working relationship with this customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I want my relationship with this customer to last long | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I enjoy working with this customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This customer leaves a lot to be desired from a relationship standpoint | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| | Strongly Agree | | | | | | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Failing to comply with this client's requests will have negative implications for me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This customer can easily switch suppliers if I fail to comply with their demands | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This customer fails to do their part of the bargain with impunity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This client threatens to switch to another supplier, to make me submit to their demands | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Overall, this customer has the upper hand in our business relationship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This client has what it takes to force our company to submit to their demands | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This client withholds critical information from us in order to control our company | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This client never tries to control our business relationship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Finally, please choose one option on each of the following questions to give us an idea of your role as a respondent

|  | Not at All |  |  |  |  | To an extreme Extent |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The amount of client interactions I do as part of my job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| The amount of selling I do as part of my job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My knowledge about the sales role | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My knowledge about my firm's activities with clients | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My confidence about answering the questions in this survey | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Your current position in the firm |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Telephone number (optional) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Email (optional |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Date: |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**[   ] I would like to receive a detailed summary of the study's report on the address provided**

**Any general comments? (optional)**

…………………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………………

**Once again, thank you for your time, insights and support!**

## Appendix 4B: Final questionnaire

**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

<u>**SALESPERSON IMPROVISATION SURVEY**</u>

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of how salespersons improvise (think and act in the moment) when responding to unexpected and urgent situations. Given the criticality of responding effectively to urgent, unforeseen customer needs and competitive surprises, we believe it is imperative to understand how improvisation affects performance and how unexpected and urgent situations may be turned into advantages.

The success of the project rests on fully completed questionnaires. Please answer every question by reflecting on your experiences. Though some questions appear similar, please answer them anyway as this is deliberately done for statistical analysis purposes.

We have enclosed a short survey titled 'Customer Questionnaire' for clients of participating sales personnel. We would appreciate your passing this survey on to your most key client.

Our questions are largely not sensitive. However, should you find anything sensitive, please be assured that your responses would be treated with the strictest confidence. Your participation in the study is voluntary and as such, should you feel unable to continue, please let us know. This project is fully funded by the University of Leeds and is guided by its protocols for confidentiality.

<u>**GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE**</u>

- This questionnaire is targeted at B2B sales personnel (sales executives, account managers, sales managers, business development managers and small business owners who manage their firms' sales activities). If you feel you are not the right person to complete the questionnaire, we would appreciate your passing it on to more suitable colleagues.
- The questionnaire is organised in sections, please pay attention to the instructions guiding each section.
- **Please answer every question**. For each statement, please select one answer option that best describes your opinion.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

Yours sincerely,

**The Project Team:**
Abena Animwaa Yeboah
Doctoral Researcher
University of Leeds Business School
United Kingdom
+447794360418
bnaay@leeds.ac.uk

Dr Nathaniel Boso (N.Boso@leeds.ac.uk)      Dr Magnus Hultman (M.Hultman@leeds.ac.uk)
Dr Dayananda Palihawadana (D.Palihawadana@lubs.leeds.ac.uk)

<u>**SECTION A**</u>
This research is about how sales personnel improvise in sales situations. When we say improvisation, we mean having to think and act in the moment. To answer the questions in this section, **please cast your mind to instances when you encounter *unexpected, urgent situations*** for which you have no strategy (or plan) and, therefore, have to improvise *(think and act in the moment)*.

➡ **For each statement select *ONE* number that best suits your answer**

| *When dealing with unexpected and urgent situations…* | Not at All | | | | | To an extreme extent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I figure out my responses as I go along | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I think and act on my feet | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I respond in the moment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I improvise my responses to the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I try to respond with available resources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I identify new ways of responding | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| *When dealing with unexpected and urgent situations…* | Not at All | | | | | To an extreme extent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I experiment with new approaches in performing my job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I generate creative ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I think out of the box | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I try to come up with fresh perspectives on old ways of doing things | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I try new approaches to problems | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I aim at originality in generating solutions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am inventive in overcoming barriers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| *When dealing with unexpected and urgent situations…* | Not at All | | | | | To an extreme extent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I respond in the moment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I deal with it on the spot | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I act spontaneously | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I respond impulsively | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My response to the situation tends to be held back by details | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I act 'on-the-spur-of-the-moment' | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I try to be reactive to the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| *When dealing with unexpected and urgent situations…* | Not at All | | | | | To an extreme extent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I take action | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I become focused on dealing with the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am not held back by procedure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I find it easy to get it over and done with | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I don't have any problem getting started on my response | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I become action oriented | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I do nothing about it | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| *When dealing with unexpected and urgent situations…* | Not at All | | | | | To an extreme extent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I try to find workable solutions by using available resources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I respond better than others with the same amount of resources would do | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I will not act until I have adequate resources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I work with what I have, hopeful that the final solution will be workable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I apply resources in ways for which they were not originally intended | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I think of different scenarios by recombining my available resources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| *When dealing with unexpected and urgent situations…* | Not at All | | | | | To an extreme extent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| I work closely with other persons in my firm | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I consult with other departments, e.g. operations before taking action | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| My performance is dependent on receivingaccurate information from others | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I need to spend some time talking to other people | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I frequently must coordinate my efforts with others | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I consult with colleagues to ensure I make decisions quickly but responsibly | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

**SECTION B**

This section captures **general** things about your work as a salesperson. You **do not** have to restrict your responses to your behaviours under unexpected, urgent situations.

➡ **For each statement select *ONE* number that best suits your answer**

| In my work… | Not at All ... To an extreme extent |
|---|---|
| I have freedom in choosing actions to satisfy customers | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I am allowed freedom to select my own sales strategies | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I have freedom to develop my own sales tactics | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I am allowed freedom to select my own problem solving actions | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I am free to develop appropriate actions towards meeting my personal targets | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I am free to develop appropriate actions towards meeting my firm's goals | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I have autonomy | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

| In my work… | Not at All ... To an extreme extent |
|---|---|
| I tend to treat each customer as unique | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| When I feel that my sales approach is not working, I change to another approach | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I like to experiment with different sales approaches | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I am very flexible in the selling approach I use | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I can easily use a wide variety of selling approaches | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I am very sensitive to the needs of my customers | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

| In my work… | Strongly Disagree ... Strongly Agree |
|---|---|
| I have enough resources | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I have enough resources to be able to see my ideas through to fruition | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I have access to a wide variety of resources for meeting customers' needs | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I have a lot of freedom in applying the firm's resources to satisfy customers | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I feel confident in my firm's ability to provide me the resources I need to work | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

| In my work… | Strongly Disagree ... Strongly Agree |
|---|---|
| I am under a lot of pressure | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I face a lot of pressure to meet high sales targets | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| If my sales targets were not met, I would be called to explain why | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I may lose my job if I consistently fail to meet targets | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| The attention of my boss is always on me | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

| In my work… | Strongly Disagree ... Strongly Agree |
|---|---|
| The customers I serve demand very high standards of quality | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| My customers require a perfect fit between their needs and our offerings | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| The customers I serve are very price sensitive | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| My customers have high expectations for after sales support | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| My customers expect the highest levels of product and service quality. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

| In my industry… | Strongly Disagree ... Strongly Agree |
|---|---|
| Competition is very intensive | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| Anything that one competitor can offer, the others can readily match | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Price competition is very common | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Our competitors are relatively weak | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Our competitors are aggressively promoting special offers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Our competitors are aggressively trying to increase market share. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my work…** | *Strongly Disagree* | | | | | *Strongly Agree* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| There are too many demands on my time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I need more hours in the day to do the things expected of me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I always seem to have too much work to do | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| There are times when I can't meet everyone's expectations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I seem to have more commitments than some other sales persons I know. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I just can't find the energy to do all the things expected of me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my work…** | *Strongly Disagree* | | | | | *Strongly Agree* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| My customers' needs tend to change frequently | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My customers tend to be on the lookout for good deals | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My customers tend to change frequently | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| New customers tend to have needs different from our existing customers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My customers' needs are largely predictable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my work…** | *Strongly Disagree* | | | | | *Strongly Agree* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Everybody is concerned with finishing at the top of the sales rankings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My co-workers frequently compare their results with mine | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My co-workers are not at all competitive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I get incentives (e.g. bonuses) to perform better than my co-workers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Getting positions (e.g. sales Manager) depend on performance relative to others | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My co-workers compete even in the absence of a reward | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **In my firm…** | *Strongly Disagree* | | | | | *Strongly Agree* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Salesperson creativity is encouraged | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Sales personnel are encouraged to be creative in solving customer problems | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Salespersons must stick strictly to strategy all the time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This firm encourages salespersons to think out of the box | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| We believe that creativity is too costly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Salespersons are encouraged to share their creative ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

**SECTION C**

This section seeks general information about aspects of your predispositions. Again, you do **not** need to restrict yourself to any particular type of selling situation.

➡️ **For each statement select *ONE* number that best suits your answer**

| **As a person…** | *Strongly Disagree* | | | | | *Strongly Agree* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am very proactive in how I do my work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I tend to motivate myself to work towards my goals | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I actively keep myself on track to complete my plans | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| When completing tasks, I monitor my behaviour against my personal standards | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I am conscious of my actions because they define my personal identity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| When completing tasks I am conscious of what I can and cannot handle | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| When completing tasks, I tend to evaluate the effectiveness of my choices | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| **As a person…** | *Strongly Disagree* | | | | | *Strongly Agree* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel confident in my ability to perform my job well | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| | |
|---|---|
| I feel that I am good at understanding customer needs | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I am good at convincing  other people | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I feel very capable of dealing with the demands of the sales job | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I feel I have the capabilities to successfully perform this job | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I feel very capable of dealing effectively with job-related problems | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |

| **As a person…** | *Strongly Disagree*          *Strongly Agree* |
|---|---|
| I enjoy competition with others | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| It is important for me to perform better than others on any task | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I try harder when I am in competition with other people | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I feel that winning is important in both work and games | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I like to perform better than my co-workers. | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |

| **As a person…** | *Strongly Disagree*          *Strongly Agree* |
|---|---|
| I am satisfied with my work as a salesperson | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| My work allows me to contribute meaningfully to my firm | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| My work allows me to contribute meaningfully to my customers | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I feel like I am living my career dream | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| My work gives me a sense of accomplishment | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I find my work to be interesting | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |

| **As a person…** | *Strongly Disagree*          *Strongly Agree* |
|---|---|
| I am always courteous even to people who are disagreeable | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |
| No matter who I am talking to, I am always a good listener | 1  2  3  4  5  6  7 |

**SECTION D**

This section seeks your assessment of your own performance. For each statement, use the left side to evaluate your past year's performance and the right side to project your performance for the next 12 months

➡ For each statement, **indicate an answer for** *the last 12 months* **and the** *next 12 months*.

| Last 12 Months | | | | | | | My performance in… | Projection for next 12 months | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Much lower than target | | | | | | Much higher than target | ⬅          ➡ | Much lower than target | | | | | | Much higher than target |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Meeting the sales targets assigned to me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Generating sales of new company products | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Increasing market share for my company | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Selling products with higher profit margins | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Selling to large volume customers in my territory | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Making significant contribution to my firm's growth | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Expanding share of business with major accounts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Meeting the sales targets assigned to me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Earning profits in commissions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Earning mark ups on my sales transactions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Meeting my commission targets | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Increasing my take home pay | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

**Please indicate your firm's approximate sales turnover for last year GHC……………………………….**

**Please indicate your firm's projected sales turnover for next year GHC ………………………………**

## SECTION E

This section seeks aspects of your job-related demographic characteristics

**Please <u>choose one option</u> below to indicate which context you do most of your selling in**

Domestic context               2. Export context3. Both domestic and export

**Please write your answers in the space on your right**

| | |
|---|---|
| How many years of experience do you have in a sales job? | |
| How many years of experience do you have in your current company? | |
| How many years of experience do you have in your current territory? | |
| How many years of experience do you have in the current industry? | |

**Please <u>choose ONE industry</u> which mainly describes your firm**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing | 8. Transportation and Storage |
| 2.Mining and Quarrying | 9. Accommodation and Food Service Activities |
| 3.Manufacturing | 10. Information and Communication |
| 4.Electricity, Gas, and Air Conditioning Supply | 11.Financial and Insurance Activities |
| 5.Water Supply, Sewerage, Waste Management | 12.Real Estate Activities |
| 6. Wholesale and Retail | 13. Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities |
| 7. Construction | 14. other |

**Please circle the point (x) on the scale that best reflects how you are paid…**
*E.g. selecting the second 'x' means you earn 90% in salary and only 10% in commissions.*

| % Salary | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 100% | 90 | 80 | 70 | 60 | 50 | 40 | 30 | 20 | 10 |
| 0% | | | | | | | | | | |
| **X**    **X**    **X**    **X**    **X**    **X**    **X**    **X**    **X**    **X**    **X** | | | | | | | | | | |
| % Commission: | 0% | 10 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 |

## SECTION F

This section relates to the most recent situation in which you had to improvise (think and act in the moment). We would appreciate if you could cast your mind to that specific event in answering the questions below**.**

| **The last time I improvised…** | *Strongly Disagree* | | | | | *Strongly Agree* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I felt satisfied with my work as a salesperson | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt that I was contributing meaningfully to my firm | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt that I was contributing meaningfully to my customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt I was doing something meaningful with my life | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt a sense of accomplishment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I felt my work is interesting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| **The last time I improvised…** | *Strongly Disagree* | | | | | *Strongly Agree* | |
| I was able to generate sales for my products | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I was able to generate sales for products that the customer usually does not buy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I was able increase my share of business with the customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I was able to meet this customer's expectations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I was able to generate sales for high profit margin products | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

*The questions that follow relate to the customer with whom <u>your most recent</u> improvisation took place*

| | *Strongly Disagree* | | | | | *Strongly Agree* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have an excellent working relationship with this customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| There is frequent interaction between me and this customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I have a good working relationship with this customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My relationship with this customer is outstanding | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I work very smoothly with this customer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

| This customer communicates freely with me on matters affecting our relationship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Strongly Disagree* | | | | | *Strongly Agree* | |
| This customer can easily switch suppliers if I fail to comply with their demands | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This client fails to do their part of the bargain with impunity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This client threatens to move to a new supplier, to make me submit to demands | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Overall, this customer has the upper hand in our business relationship | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This client has what it takes to force our company to submit to their demands | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| This client withholds critical information from us in order to control our company | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

**Finally, please choose one option on each of the following questions to give us an idea of your role as a respondent**

| | *Not at All* | | | | | *To an extreme extent* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The amount of client interactions I do as part of my job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| The amount of selling I do as part of my job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| My knowledge about the sales role | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

**Gender:MaleFemale**

**Email** (*for sharing our findings with you* ……………………………………………………..

**Would you like to receive a summary of the study's findings?**        Yes        No

Date

**Comments (Optional):**

……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

**This project would greatly benefit from the input of your customers as well. We would, therefore, appreciate it if you could pass on the enclosed 'Customer Questionnaire' to the customer with whom you tend to improvise most.**

Once again, thank you for sharing your rich experiences with us. We are truly grateful and would get back to you in due course with our findings (if you have included your email and requested for it).

For Leeds University Business School use only

Survey Code:

**Appendix 4C: Ethical Approval**

# UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Abena Animwaa Yeboah
Marketing Division, LUBS
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT

**ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee
University of Leeds**

23 May 2016

Dear Abena

| | |
|---|---|
| **Title of study:** | **Salesperson improvisation: An empirical examination of its consequences and bounda**26 April 2016**ries** |
| **Ethics reference:** | **AREA 12-142** |

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

| Document | Version | Date |
|---|---|---|
| AREA 12-142 ethical review as submitted.pdf | 1 | 16/07/13 |
| AREA 12-142 signed risk assessment form.pdf | 1 | 17/07/13 |

Committee members made the following comments about your application:
1. It should be made clear to the participants if there is a point after which they cannot withdraw.
2. Security of personal data (names, addresses etc) requires protection by password or encryption when on a portable device. Data should be stored on a University server such as your M drive where it is secure and backed up regularly rather than on a portable device.
3. There are some spelling errors on the request for participation eg paragraph 3: "if you too your time… "

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely


Jennifer Blaikie
Senior Research Ethics Administrator, Research & Innovation Service
On behalf of Dr Andrew Evans, Chair, AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee

CC: Student's supervisor(s)

**Appendix 5 A: Items deleted during measure purification**

| Construct | Deleted items* | |
|---|---|---|
| **CFA model1** | | |
| Construct | Item | Loadings |
| **Salesperson Creativity** | CREAT2 | .63 |
| | CREAT3 | .68 |
| | CREAT4 | .63 |
| **Salesperson Spontaneity** | SPONT4 | .78 |
| | SPONT5 | .58 |
| | SPONT7 | .68 |
| **CFA model2** | | |
| **Individual agency** | AGEN1 | .76 |
| | AGEN2 | .60 |
| | AGEN3 | .79 |
| | AGEN4 | .69 |
| **Sales performance** | PERF1 | .66 |
| | PERF2 | .67 |
| | PERF6 | .72 |
| **Salesperson self-efficacy** | EFFI1 | .73 |
| | EFFI2 | .62 |
| **Salesperson experience** | EXPER2 | .60 |
| **Adaptive selling behaviour** | ADAPT6 | .72 |
| **CFA model3** | | |
| **Salesperson autonomy** | AUTON1 | .67 |
| | AUTON5 | .68 |
| | AUTON 6 | .67 |
| | AUTON 7 | .70 |
| **Resource availability** | RES5 | .78 |
| *Although the factor loadings of these items were seemingly high suggesting adequate internal consistency, they were each accompanied by high error terms, hence the decision to exclude them from further analysis* | | |

**Appendix 5B: Details of purified scales**

| Item code | Item Descriptions (Anchors) |
|---|---|
| **Salesperson self-efficacy   (1= Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)** | |
| EFFI4 | I feel very capable of dealing with the demands of the sales job |
| EFFI5 | I feel I have the capabilities to successfully perform this job |
| EFFI6 | I feel very capable of dealing effectively with job-related problems |
| **Salesperson experience   (actual figures)** | |
| EXPER1 | How many years of experience do you have in a sales job? |
| EXPER3 | How many years of experience do you have in your current territory? |
| EXPER4 | How many years of experience do you have in the current industry? |
| **Salesperson autonomy   (1 = Not at all; 7 = to an extreme extent)** | |
| AUTON2 | I am allowed freedom to select my own sales strategies |
| AUTON3 | I have freedom to develop my own sales tactics |
| AUTON4 | I am allowed freedom to select my own problem solving actions |
| **Salesperson creativity   (1 = Not at all; 7 = to an extreme extent)** | |
| CREAT5 | I try new approaches to problems |
| CREAT6 | I aim at originality in generating solutions |
| CREAT7 | I am inventive in overcoming barriers |
| **Salesperson spontaneity (1 = Not at all; 7 = to an extreme extent)** | |
| SPONT1 | I respond in the moment |
| SPONT2 | I deal with it on the spot |
| SPONT3 | I act spontaneously |
| SPONT6 | I act 'on-the-spur-of-the-moment' |
| **Resource availability   (1= Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)** | |
| RES1 | I have enough resources |
| RES2 | I have enough resources to be able to see my ideas through to fruition |
| RES3 | I have access to a wide variety of resources for meeting customers' needs |
| RES4 | I have a lot of freedom in applying the firm's resources to satisfy customers |
| **Pressure to perform   (1= Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)** | |
| PRES1 | I am under a lot of pressure |
| PRES2 | I face a lot of pressure to meet high sales targets |
| PRES3 | If my sales targets were not met, I would be called to explain why |

**Appendix 5B: Details of purified scales (continued)**

| Item code | Item Descriptions (Anchors) |
|---|---|
| **Individual agency** | **(1= Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)** |
| AGEN5 | I am conscious of my actions because they define my personal identity |
| AGEN6 | When completing tasks I am conscious of what I can and cannot handle |
| AGEN7 | When completing tasks, I tend to evaluate the effectiveness of my choices |
| **Sales performance** | **(1 = Much lower than target; 7 = Much higher than target)** |
| PERF3 | Increasing market share for my company |
| PERF4 | Selling products with higher profit margins |
| PERF5 | Selling to large volume customers in my territory |
| PERF7 | Expanding share of business with major accounts |
| **Adaptive selling** | **(1 = Not at all; 7 = to an extreme extent)** |
| ADAPT3 | I like to experiment with different sales approaches |
| ADAPT4 | I am very flexible in the selling approach I use |
| ADAPT5 | I can easily use a wide variety of selling approaches |
| **Compensation type** | |
| COMPEN | % Salary<br>100%  90  80  70  60  50  40  30  20  10    0%<br>  x      x    x    x    x    x    x    x    x    x      x<br>0%      10  20  30  40  50  60  70  80  90  100<br>% Commission: |
| **Industry type** | |
| INDUS | 1 = service; 2= manufacturing/production; 3= other |

**Appendix 5C: Inter-Item Correlations of purified scales**

| Salesperson self-efficacy | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | EFFI4 | EFFI5 | EFFI6 |
| **EFFI4** | 1 | | |
| **EFFI5** | .80** | 1 | |
| **EFFI6** | .65** | .82** | 1 |
| ** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* | | | |

| Salesperson experience | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | EXPER1 | EXPER3 | EXPER4 |
| **EXPER1** | 1 | | |
| **EXPER3** | .66** | 1 | |
| **EXPER4** | .78** | .72** | 1 |
| ***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* | | | |

| Salesperson autonomy | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | AUTON 2 | AUTON 3 | AUTON 4 |
| **AUTON 2** | 1 | | |
| **AUTON 3** | .67** | 1 | |
| **AUTON 4** | .64** | .60** | 1 |
| ** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* | | | |

| Salesperson creativity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | CREAT5 | CREAT6 | CREAT7 |
| **CREAT5** | 1 | | |
| **CREAT6** | .55 | 1 | |
| **CREAT7** | .52 | .60 | 1 |

| Salesperson spontaneity | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SPONT1 | SPONT2 | SPONT3 | SPONT6 |
| **SPONT1** | 1 | | | |
| **SPONT2** | .75 | 1 | | |
| **SPONT3** | .66 | .70 | 1 | |
| **SPONT6** | .71 | .60 | .62 | 1 |

| Resource availability | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | RES1 | RES2 | RES3 | RES4 |
| **RES1** | 1 | | | |
| **RES2** | .90** | 1 | | |
| **RES3** | .85** | .84** | 1 | |
| **RES4** | .76** | .76** | .81** | 1 |
| ** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* | | | | |

| Pressure to perform | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | PRES1 | PRES2 | PRES3 |
| **PRES1** | 1 | | |
| **PRES2** | .56** | 1 | |
| **PRES3** | .55** | .54** | 1 |
| ** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* | | | |

**Appendix 5C: Inter-Item Correlations of purified scales (continued)**

| Individual agency | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | AGEN5 | AGEN6 | AGEN7 |
| **AGEN5** | 1 | | |
| **AGEN6** | .72** | 1 | |
| **AGEN7** | .74** | .70** | 1 |
| ** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* | | | |

| Sales performance | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PERF3 | PERF4 | PERF5 | PERF7 |
| **PERF3** | 1 | | | |
| **PERF4** | .69 | 1 | | |
| **PERF5** | .75 | .71 | 1 | |
| **PERF7** | .63 | .57 | .71 | 1 |

| Adaptive selling behaviour | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ADAPT3 | ADAPT4 | ADAPT5 |
| **ADAPT3** | 1 | | |
| **ADAPT4** | .68** | 1 | |
| **ADAPT5** | .60** | .82** | 1 |
| ** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* | | | |

**Appendix 5D: Item-Scale Correlations of purified scales**

| Construct | Items | Mean | SD | Alpha | Corrected item-total corr. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Salesperson self-efficacy** | EFFI4 | 5.56 | .81 | .89 | .79 |
| | EFFI5 | 5.58 | .81 | | .84 |
| | EFFI6 | 5.55 | .77 | | .72 |
| **Salesperson experience** | EXPER 1 | 6.04 | 3.59 | .87 | .78 |
| | EXPER3 | 3.44 | 2.31 | | .73 |
| | EXPER4 | 4.14 | 3.05 | | .83 |
| **Salesperson autonomy** | AUTON 2 | 5.12 | 1.25 | .83 | .73 |
| | AUTON3 | 5.26 | .93 | | .71 |
| | AUTON4 | 4.91 | 1.03 | | .68 |
| **Salesperson creativity** | CREAT5 | 5.08 | .84 | .79 | .60 |
| | CREAT6 | 5.05 | .86 | | .66 |
| | CREAT7 | 5.15 | .79 | | .64 |
| **Salesperson spontaneity** | SPONT1 | 4.98 | 1.13 | .89 | .81 |
| | SPONT2 | 4.91 | 1.11 | | .78 |
| | SPONT3 | 4.74 | 1.02 | | .74 |
| | SPONT6 | 4.52 | 1.06 | | .72 |
| **Resource availability** | RES1 | 5.43 | 1.20 | .94 | .90 |
| | RES2 | 5.37 | 1.20 | | .89 |
| | RES3 | 5.19 | 1.17 | | .90 |
| | RES4 | 5.08 | 1.21 | | .81 |
| **Pressure to perform** | PRESS1 | 5.62 | 1.33 | .78 | .63 |
| | PRESS2 | 5.65 | 1.08 | | .63 |
| | PRESS3 | 5.56 | 1.12 | | .62 |
| **Individual agency** | AGEN5 | 5.51 | .81 | .88 | .79 |
| | AGEN6 | 5.50 | .80 | | .76 |
| | AGEN7 | 5.53 | .76 | | .78 |
| **Sales performance** | PERF3 | 5.14 | .87 | .89 | .79 |
| | PERF4 | 5.10 | .91 | | .74 |
| | PERF5 | 5.17 | .99 | | .83 |
| | PERF7 | 5.07 | .89 | | .71 |
| **Adaptive selling behaviour** | ADAPT 3 | 5.54 | .94 | .87 | .67 |
| | ADAPT4 | 5.55 | .80 | | .83 |
| | ADAPT5 | 5.49 | .82 | | .76 |
| **Compensation type** | - | - | - | - | - |
| **Industry type** | - | - | - | - | - |

**Appendix 5E: Post Hoc dimensions interaction effects model**

| Predictors | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 4.11 | .42 | | 9.78 | .00 |
| Industry type | -.09 | .11 | -.05 | -.82 | .41 |
| Compensation type | .02 | .02 | .05 | .81 | .41 |
| Adaptive selling behaviour | .17 | .07 | .17 | 2.39 | .01 |
| Creativity | -.13 | .08 | -.11 | -1.54 | .12 |
| Spontaneity | .13 | .06 | .16 | 2.17 | .03 |
| Creativity*Spontaneity | -.00 | .03 | -.01 | -.21 | .83 |
| *Dependent variable: Sales performance* | | | | | |