



Examining the link between salesperson networking behaviors, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment: Does gender matter?



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ABSTRACT

Sales professionals are embedded in an array of social interactions through their networking behaviors, yet the literature's understanding of these effects on job-based attitudes is relatively limited. Further, research suggests that men and women, not only network differently, but also often benefit in different ways from networking. This study examines the extent to which gender moderates the relationships between three forms of salesperson networking behaviors, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The data from a survey of 179 salespeople indicates that networking behaviors are related to job satisfaction and commitment in sales. However, the relationships vary for male and female salespeople. When analyzed separately, job satisfaction relates positively to professional networking for women, while job satisfaction relates positively to peer networking for men. In addition, peer networking directly relates to organizational commitment for women, rather than mediated by job satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decades, increasing numbers of women have established careers in professional sales. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women comprised approximately 49.6% of all positions within sales and sales related occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). This trend stimulated a fair amount of research examining potential differences in attitudes and behavior between male and female salespeople. Research examining the direct effects of gender has produced somewhat mixed results (e.g., Moncrief, Babakus, Cravens, & Johnston, 2000). An alternative approach is to examine how gender moderates the relationships between key antecedents, work attitudes, and outcomes (e.g., Babin & Boles, 1998; Boles, Wood, & Johnson, 2003). These studies suggest that even though there may not be many differences in global constructs (e.g., overall job satisfaction), there may be differences in the nature and strength of relationships between key constructs based on gender.

One salesperson attitude of particular interest is job satisfaction (e.g., Brown & Peterson, 1993), because of its links to organizational commitment and turnover intentions (Boles, Madupalli, Rutherford, & Wood, 2007). An extensive body of research has identified a number of major categories of antecedents of job satisfaction (Churchill, Ford,

Hartley, & Walker, 1985; Verbeke, Dietz, & Verwaal, 2011). However, research on job satisfaction has largely ignored the potential of social influences inherent within the sales profession (Hurlbert, 1991; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). With the exception of research on the effects of workplace isolation (Marshall, Michaels, & Mulki, 2007) and some research on friendships (e.g., Swan, Goodwin, Mayo, & Richardson, 2001), little research has been devoted to effects of social interactions in sales. This lack of empirical research on the link between social influences and job satisfaction creates a gap within the literature, as the value of developing and nurturing relationships has been highly regarded within the personal selling and marketing literature (Palmatier, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 2007).

As the sales profession continues to evolve toward a role in which the salesperson is embedded in an array of social interactions (Bradford et al., 2010), critical skills such as networking are essential (Bradford & Weitz, 2012). However, scholars note the lack of research focused on networking behaviors in the sales literature (Flaherty, Lam, Lee, Mulki, & Dixon, 2012; Seevers, Skinner, & Kelley, 2007). This is unfortunate, as networking behavior, individuals' attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career (Forret & Dougherty, 2001), is an important career skillset (Todd, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009) and a proactive approach to personal growth and development (Thompson, 2005). Since the literature suggests potential differences in both how men and women network and in how they may benefit from networking behavior (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Van Emmerik, Euwema, Geschiere, & Schouten, 2006), research on potential differences in sales would be beneficial.

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Therefore, the model in this study links three common forms of networking behaviors to salesperson job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and specifically examines the extent to which gender moderates these relationships (Fig. 1). The study contributes to the literature by examining an under-researched but important set of sales behaviors (networking), their impacts on key attitudes and outcomes, and potential differences for male and female salespeople.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Networking behaviors and job satisfaction

Forret and Dougherty (2001, p. 283) define networking behavior as “individuals’ attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career.” Networking behavior captures the investment that people make in developing and maintaining relationships. People benefit from these relationships because it increases their “access to task-related, career, and emotional coping resources” (Van Emmerik, 2006). For example, sales research shows that internal networking can increase access to expertise, improve task performance, and ultimately improve overall performance (Stewart, Walker, Hutt, & Kumar, 2010; Üstüner & Iacobucci, 2012).

At work, co-workers or peers provide social support (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), which can reduce job stress and promote security and positive moods (Rego & Cunha, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Peer networking can facilitate salesperson socialization, thereby leading to clearer role perceptions and expectations (Podolny & Baron, 1997). By providing resources such as advice, instruction, and assistance, coworkers can help reduce employee role ambiguity, conflict, and overload (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), all factors considered to have negative impacts on job satisfaction (Ford, Walker, & Churchill, 1979). Networking within one’s own organization can enhance that individual’s reputation (Stewart et al., 2010) leading to higher status and feelings of career success (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Specifically in sales, Marshall et al. (2007) found a significant negative correlation between perceived workplace isolation and job satisfaction. This finding adds support to the contention that effort to connect with peers is likely to impact job satisfaction. Based on this discussion, the first hypothesis argues that a positive association exists between peer networking and job satisfaction.

H1. There is a positive relationship between peer networking behavior and salesperson job satisfaction.

External networking behaviors targeting other professionals may also enhance job satisfaction. Hence, the model incorporates networking with other professionals as the second antecedent. Professional networking behaviors provide access to useful non-redundant sources of information, such as best practices and business trends (Chang, 2005). For salespeople, Hartmann, Rutherford, Hamwi, and Friend (2012) suggest that professional associations can provide access to external mentors. Participating in professional organizations may increase feelings of professionalism and self-efficacy (Clarke, 2011). Involvement in professional organizations may also enhance reputation and status in a broader arena leading to feelings of greater career success (Forret & Dougherty, 2004).

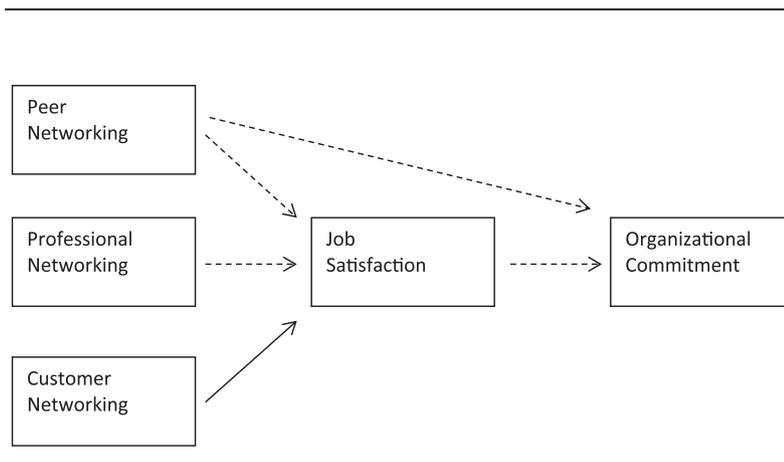
H2. There is a positive relationship between professional networking behavior and salesperson job satisfaction.

The third hypothesis examines the development and maintenance of relationships with customers, customer networking. The literature suggests that customer networking can also impact salesperson job satisfaction. Two recent studies provide evidence that greater interaction with people outside of one’s own organization is significantly related to job satisfaction (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Since salespeople are boundary spanners, their role sets include people outside of their organizations, who also act as role senders (Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981). Therefore, in the same sense that peers aid the socialization process and clearer role perceptions, customers may also assist in this process. Customers serve as an important source of feedback. Greater interaction with customers is also likely to provide more access to important information and other job-related resources (Üstüner & Godes, 2006). Swan et al. (2001) found that some customers are more like coworkers, thus providing some of the same resources and benefits as real co-workers within one’s own organization. This may be particularly important in sales, as many salespeople have limited face-to-face interaction with peers in their own organizations (Marshall et al., 2007).

H3. There is a positive relationship between customer networking behavior and salesperson job satisfaction.

2.2. Networking behavior and gender differences

While network behaviors may be beneficial to both men’s and women’s career success, the literature suggests potential differences in both how men and women network and in how they may benefit (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Social role theory provides a framework



Dashed lines indicate relationships with hypothesized gender differences.

Fig. 1. Hypothesized model.

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