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The moderating effects of gender and inside versus outside sales role in multifaceted job satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Two key trends in B2B sales organizations are increased representation by females in sales roles and a shift toward more inside sales positions than has been true in the past. Prior work on multifaceted job satisfaction among salespeople has not fully taken these elements into account. This study furthers the literature by examining the moderating role of gender and inside versus outside sales role on multifaceted job satisfaction. Results provide opportunity for provocative discussion among sales organizational leadership of more customized approaches to improve the satisfaction of the sales force.

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1. Introduction

Salesperson job satisfaction is critical for firms to understand, given the empirical regularity of its positive impact on employee commitment and negative impact on turnover (Mulki, Jaramillo, & Locander, 2006; Rutherford, Boles, Hamwi, Madupalli, & Rutherford, 2009). A developing stream of research focuses on gender differences within the sales force (e.g. Babin & Boles, 1998; Boles, Madupalli, Rutherford, & Wood, 2007; Boles, Wood, & Johnson, 2003; Ladik, Marshall, Lassk, & Moncrief, 2002; Russ & McNeilly, 1995). Collectively these studies suggest that gender may moderate the relationship between various antecedents and multifaceted job satisfaction. Providing firms with a better understanding of which relationships are moderated by gender will allow them to develop better methods to increase levels of job satisfaction based on the composition of the sales force.

Moreover, prior research notes differences between inside versus outside salespeople (Boyle, 1996; Gessner & Scott, 2009; Marshall & Vredenburg, 1991; Narus & Anderson, 1986), with clear indications that important differences exist (not surprising, as these roles tend to be quite different on some dimensions). Given this, firms looking to increase inside salesperson job satisfaction should benefit from an understanding of the differentially moderating impact of the type of sales role. In either case, although similarities exist, the differences may render firms inefficient in increasing inside business-to-business salesperson job satisfaction.

The principal objective of this study is to enhance the understanding of antecedents of multifaceted job satisfaction by providing further context clarification of the moderating effect of: 1) gender and 2) inside versus outside salespeople on the linkages between job satisfaction and its antecedents.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1. Role theory

Role theory presumes that people are members of social positions and hold expectations for their own behaviors (Biddle, 1986). According to Walker, Churchill, and Ford, "the role attached to a given social position is the set of activities or desired behaviors that are to be performed, at least approximately, by any person occupying that position" (1975, p. 33). Two roles often examined within the literature are an individual's work and family roles (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Grandey, Cordeiro, & Crouter, 2005; Shelton, Danes, & Eisenman, 2008; Walker, Churchill, & Ford, 1975). Within the work role, one is likely to experience role stress and conflict between their roles at work and home (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Grandey et al., 2005). Inside salespeople may experience different forms of conflict between work and family than do outside salespeople, who typically travel away from home more extensively.

Further, a person's gender may be inextricably linked to the roles that he/she performs (Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). In many societies, females may be more likely to take the lead in a traditional family role and that role can impinge on the work role (Grandey et al., 2005). Given the different demands of these roles, attempts to effectively balance between them can have an impact on job satisfaction. Specifically, the extent to which one's job is satisfying depends in part on the extent to which the job is seen as

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either harmonious with or threatening to other self-relevant roles. When self-relevant roles are threatened, then the source of the threat is viewed negatively and dissatisfaction (with work or family or both) is likely to result (Grandey et al., 2005).

2.2. Antecedents to job satisfaction

Boles et al. (2003) examine role conflict, role ambiguity, and work-family conflict as antecedents of multifaceted job satisfaction. Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) define role conflict as the degree that expectations of a role are incompatible or incongruent with the reality of the role and role ambiguity as the extent to which an individual is unclear about the role expectations of others, as well as the degree of uncertainty associated with one's role performance.

Work–family conflict (hereafter WFC) and family–work conflict (hereafter FWC) can be examined as two separate constructs (e.g. Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996; Netemeyer, Brashear-Alejandro, & Boles, 2004). According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), "WFC is a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are in some respect incompatible" (p.76). FWC is a form of inter-role conflict where the demands created by the family interfere with performing work-related responsibilities (Netemeyer et al., 1996). One of the stated limitations in the Boles et al. (2003) study is that they look only at WFC and not FWC. They state, "future sales force research should examine the effects of FWC as well as further examine the work and non-work effects of WFC" (p.110).

Another stream of research examining antecedents of multifaceted job satisfaction involves emotional exhaustion (Rutherford et al., 2009). Emotional exhaustion is, "…the feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work" (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 101). Emotional exhaustion occurs when workers are facing exorbitant demands on their time and energy. These workers often feel helpless, lose self-esteem, feel a lack of accomplishment, and develop negative attitudes about customers, the organization, their job, and themselves (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Research suggests that emotional exhaustion is negatively linked to job satisfaction (Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1999; Jaramillo, Mulki, & Locander, 2006; Mulki et al., 2006).

According to Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1986), perceived organizational support is the general belief about the extent to which the organization values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being. Some prior work examines the impact of perceived organizational support on job satisfaction (e.g. Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1996; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Piercy, Cravens, Lane, & Vorhies, 2006). Fig. 1 portrays the model.

2.3. Gender as a moderator

Gender is examined as a moderator within studies looking at both antecedents and outcomes of facets of job satisfaction (e.g. Babin & Boles, 1998; Boles et al., 2003; Boles et al., 2007; Ladik et al., 2002). Boles et al. (2003) find that gender differences impact the relationship between 1) role ambiguity, 2) role conflict, and 3) WFC in relation to the facets of job satisfaction.

Boles et al. (2007) and Ladik et al. (2002) examine gender as a moderator and multifaceted job satisfaction as antecedents to organizational commitment and propensity to leave, respectively. Boles et al. (2007) find that men are more concerned with satisfaction with promotion and pay and females are more concerned with satisfaction with co-workers in developing higher commitment. Ladik et al. (2002) examine gender differences using the JDI scale in relation to propensity to leave, finding that for high performers, satisfaction with pay is more important

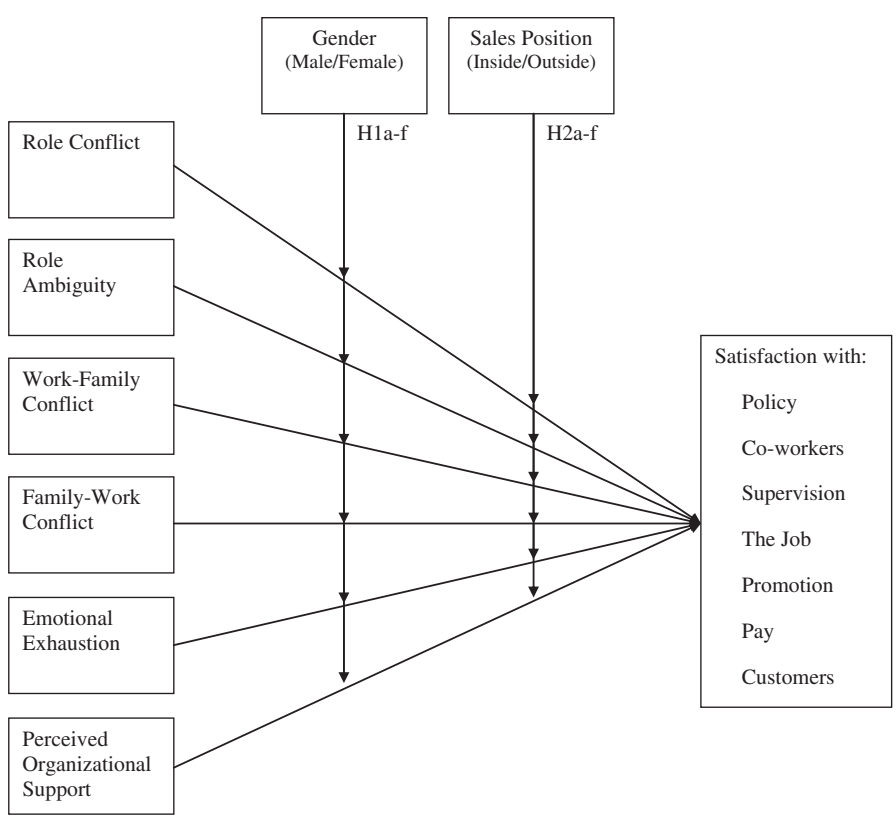

Fig. 1. Proposed model.

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