

SOCO's Impact on Individual Sales Performance: The Mediating Role of Cross-functional Integration

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Abstract

The effects of sales orientation (SO) and customer orientation (CO) on individual performance and the mediating effects of cross-functional integration are examined in this research. The assumption, two types of selling motivation (SOCO) differentially influence individual performance, is modified by evaluating the mediating role of cross-functional integration based upon the rationale is that SO emphasizes self-interest whereas CO involves knowledge sharing and internal communication. Hypotheses are tested with structural equation modeling using survey data from 236 salespeople in a Japanese industrial company and it is found that SO directly influenced individual performance but cross-functional integration completely mediated the relationship between CO and individual performance. Based on these results, the importance of SOCO both in order to increase upper performance is emphasized and a new perspective on the cross-functional integration of salespeople is provided.

Keywords

sales orientation, customer orientation, salespeople, Japanese industrial company, integration, individual performance

(1) Introduction

In the context of increased domestic and international market competition, the

importance of formulating diverse sales strategy and managing the behavior of salespeople has been the focus of considerable

academic attention and research interest (Franke and Park, 2006). Although satisfaction with and maintenance of long-term relationships with customers are critical, firms also pursue short-term interests even though in business-to-business transactions. Therefore, salespeople should adapt diverse sales strategy with exclusive psychological orientations.

This study tests that how salesperson-level sales orientation (SO) and customer orientation (CO) affect the performance of those salespeople by evaluating mediating effect of cross-functional integration behavior. SO is the degree to which salespeople prioritize their own needs and/or the needs of the firm over those of their customers by attempting to sell as much as possible. Conversely, CO means that the degree to which salespeople try to help customers make purchase decisions to satisfy the needs of the latter and the extent to which they enjoy doing so (Saxe and Weitz, 1982; Brown et al., 1997). Most researches on the selling behavior of salespeople have usually discussed SO as being inversely related to CO (e.g., Saxe and Weitz, 1982). However, SOCO is not exactly inversed concepts because their effects to performance unseparated (Schwepker, 2003). Related empirical research has reported a positive or a non-influential relationship between SO and performance (e.g., Boles et al., 2001; Wachnel et al., 2009) and has argued for additional research to test this relationship further by addressing whether both components of SOCO have a positive impact on performance (Wachnel et al., 2009; Goad and Jaramillo, 2014).

In addition, the academic literature examining SOCO has revealed that this phenomenon enhances individual sales performance, but it has ignored the possibility that the observed effect is the result of intervening variables. According to a personality-performance perspective, which provide a framework for how personality affects behavior at work, a specific psychological state affects individual performance through proactive processes (Goad and Jaramillo, 2014). As a sales-related concept, SOCO may affect individual performance through the activation of a particular stage of organizational development, such as integration with other knowledgeable members. The integration of salespeople with a variety of functional members is critical for exchanging information and activating organizational learning, which may affect the effectiveness and ability of a salesperson (Rouzes et al., 2005). This behavior of salespeople may reasonably be expected to influence individual performance. In particular, CO may prompt the delivery of high customer value by increasing internal dissemination of market-related information and enhancing coordination with other functional members.

By examining the effects of SOCO on individual performance and investigating the mediating role of integration, it may be possible to identify the real effects of SOCO which clarify their implications for sales managers.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, I discuss the extant literature on the sales behavior of salespeople and their integration with other functional

members. Then it is developed related hypotheses. Next, I present the methods used in our empirical research and discuss the results. Then the theoretical and managerial implications of findings are presented. Finally, it is discussed the limitations of this study and implications for future research.

(2) Conceptual background

1. Sales motivation of salespeople

Research regarding the sales motivation of salespeople has developed the SOCO criterion to estimate the degree to which tasks are effectively accomplished by salespeople. The degree of SOCO is important for organizations because it influences the job-related attitudes and goals of salespeople (Schwepker, 2003; Jaramillo et al., 2007).

The SOCO scale incorporates two subscales: SO (sales-oriented selling) and CO (customer-oriented selling). The SOCO scale addresses the following characteristics of a customer-oriented sales process: the desire to help customers make satisfactory purchase decisions, helping customers assess their needs, offering products that will satisfy manipulative tactics, and avoiding the use of high-pressure selling (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Based on these assumptions, one line of research on SOCO has proceeded from the notion that both types of sales effectiveness can be investigated using only one measurement (Pettijohn et al., 2007). Drawing on the stance that SO should be limited to encourage CO, several studies have examined the more effective aspects of the SOCO approach and the antecedents of the CO approach in particular (Widmier, 2002).

On the other hand, another line of

research is based on the view that SOCO are distinct rather than opposite constructs and that they should be assessed with separate measures (Guenzi et al., 2011). Specifically, the antecedents and benefits of CO, such as job satisfaction, commitment, organizational citizenship, and the behavior of members, have been outlined (Cross et al., 2007).

Despite numerous studies have attempted to identify and explore the relationship between performance and sales motivation, no consensus has developed in this regard (Goad and Jaramillo., 2014). Indeed, few researchers have focused on SO as a significant contributor to performance because they have assumed that SO is negatively related to organizational outcomes under the rationale that the use of a primarily sales-oriented sales strategy involves less concern for customers' interests (e.g., Guenzi et al., 2009). However, the impact of SO on sales performance remains uncertain (Schwepker, 2003).

In addition, only a few potential moderating factors, such as differences in performance measurements (subjective or objective) (Jaramillo et al., 2007) and the level of skill of salespeople (Wachner et al., 2009), have been examined with regard to the relationship between SOCO and sales performance. These studies have shown that various external and individual factors can affect the relationship between SOCO and performance, but the impact of internal factors, such as integration with other functional members of the organization, has not been well studied.

2. Cross-functional integration of salespeople

In general, the sale of products and services is not the exclusive province of marketing or sales but also involves multiple functional members (Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy, 2007). Cross-functional integration, a structure that maximizes a firm's effectiveness, has been addressed by three approaches within the relevant literature: the interaction, collaboration, and composite perspectives (Kahn and Mentzer, 1998). According to Kahn (1996), interaction includes physical activities, such as meetings, e-mails, telephone calls, and cross-functional training, whereas collaboration involves intangible elements, such as mutual understanding, common vision, and information sharing or building.

Some empirical research has shown that collaboration is a feature of successful performance that promotes market satisfaction and identifies the behavior that is most important for new product development (NPD) (Kahn and Mentzer, 1998; Kahn, 2001). However, since interaction and collaboration are closely parallel, the composite perspective has been accepted, according to the goals of integration, for discussing cross-functional integration (Song & Montoya-Weiss, 2001; Rouzie et al., 2005). In this research, salesperson's integration with other functional members is focused, using "integration" to refer to the extent of information exchange and personal interaction. Integration is an internal option available to salespeople and that it creates value for customers. The important functions of integration are discussed in terms of the cross-functional relationships related to marketing, such as those involving R&D (Kahn and Mentzer, 1998), human resources (Chimhanzi and Morgan, 2005),

and sales (Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al., 2007).

Research in these areas has suggested that integration is vital to overall performance on both individual and group levels. For example, Kahn and Mentzer (1998) showed that integration among different functional members has a positive influence on performance in terms of department success, overall firm performance, and NPD because information exchange that is intrinsic to integration allows members to reduce uncertainty, thereby facilitating different types of performance. Similarly, Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy (2007) empirically determined that collaboration between sales and marketing is positively associated with business performance. At the individual level, Chimhanzi and Morgan (2005) found that informal interaction in the dyadic relationship between marketing and human resources increases familiarity but reduces competitiveness by prompting mutual understanding of others' personality traits and preferences. Moreover, Guenzi and Troilo (2006) showed that salespeople can foster marketing capability (e.g., marketing sense, understanding market trends, and customer relations) by increasing the relevance of their interactions with marketing.

(3) Model and hypotheses

The conceptual model, which illustrates the relationship between constructs, is shown in Figure 1. Although extant research suggests that SO by itself negatively affects customer loyalty and job satisfaction as it prioritizes short-term interests over customer satisfaction (Boles et al., 2001; Schwepker,

2003), SO is often the most effective sales strategy for improving individual performance. Wachnel et al. (2009) reported that SO directly increased individual sales performance in B-to-B market settings and found that this tendency was stronger when salespeople were less skilled at selling. Moreover, SO develops certain types of customer relationships. Boles et al. (2001) accurately observed that SO was not harmful for relationships with customers in in-store retail settings because customers expect salespeople to engage in selling-oriented behavior to some degree. Similarly, according to Singh and Koshy (2011), SO is positively associated with the development of customer relationships in the short- or medium-term. On the other hand, Schwepker (2003) argued that salespeople are more likely to utilize SO in an effort to meet relevant demands and goals when management employs outcome-based measurements (e.g., financial performance) to evaluate their performance. Harries et al. (2005) found that performance orientation positively influenced SO, suggesting that highly performance-oriented salespeople are focused on short-term rather than long-term success, and that they, in turn, behave in a way to maximize their extrinsic rewards. This may imply that when salespeople adopt a stronger sales-oriented approach, they increase their attention to the act of selling itself and place the highest priority on finding effective methods for increasing performance. These discussions show that SO is influential in increasing sales performance. Building on the aforementioned theoretical and empirical foundations, first hypothesis is as follows:

H1. Sales orientation positively affects individual sales performance.

CO is considered as a long-term sales approach. Various studies have shown that CO improves individual performance by encouraging salespeople to focus on increasing long-term customer satisfaction and avoiding behaviors that may lead to customer dissatisfaction (Franke and Park, 2006; Boles et al., 2001; Arndt and Karande, 2012). Franke and Park (2006) argued that a customer-oriented salesperson finds the process of satisfying customers' needs to be intrinsically pleasing. Cross et al. (2007) also showed a positive effect of CO on performance. Their rationale was that a salesperson is often the only representative of the organization to interact with the customer, and the individual salesperson's focus on satisfying customer needs is therefore a crucial subject of inquiry. Moreover, salespeople who have a high-CO approach tend to build stronger customer relationships (Bole et al., 2001). Such relationships lead to more frequent repeat sales, more word-of-mouth referrals, and overall, a more desirable image for the selling firm.

H2. Customer orientation positively affects individual sales performance.

Improved information flow and flexibility of responses by team members can allow resources to be quickly and easily disengaged from unproductive uses and applied to new opportunities (Ford and Randolph, 1992). By transmitting information and interacting with members who work in complementary functions, salespeople are more likely to increase their product knowledge and effectively control their schedules. Moreover,

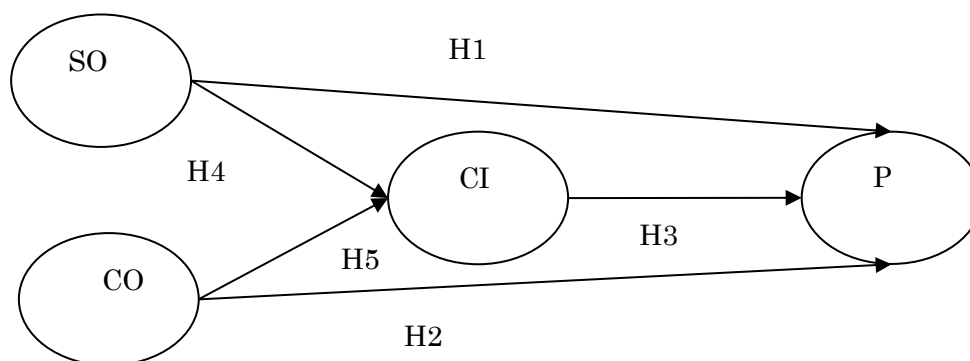


Figure 1. Conceptual model and hypothesized relationships

Note: SO=sales orientation, CO=customer orientation

CI=cross-functional integration, P= salespersons' performance

a network can supplement an individual's ability to respond well to new challenges when that individual knows from whom to seek information or expertise (Cross and Cumming, 2004). In this regard, salespeople who are more aware of other functional members' expertise are likely to contact the right people at the right time when information and technical support is required for their tasks. Based on these considerations, the following hypothesis is developed:

H3. Cross-functional integration positively affects individual sales performance.

This research proposes that SO is negatively related to integration with other functional members. Because SO emphasizes that a salesperson's self-interest over that of customers, it is stimulated by the general output evaluation systems of organizations (Sujan et al., 1994). Auh and Menguc (2013) reported that a reward practice that links pay increases to performance is negatively related to knowledge-sharing behaviors. This relationship involves a self-interested

perspective that holds that "people choose after assessing the probable gains and losses in well-being from a set of alternative actions" (Knoke, 1990, p. 31). When knowledge sharing with other functional members is not part of a formal job description, it is difficult to motivate self-interested salespeople because they engage primarily in efforts to achieve rewards.

H4. Sales orientation negatively affects cross-functional integration.

Customers in B-to-B contexts require a full array of services, including help with problem-solving processes and efforts to increase the productivity of their sales force (Leigh and Marshall, 2001). Therefore, the role of salespeople is increasingly associated with account management and solution development. For example, Storbacka et al. (2009, p. 982) argued that "for salespeople to succeed in a servitised sales process they require knowledge held not just by marketing but also by operations and finance, resulting in the need for greater internal communication." This means that, for

salespeople who emphasize customer satisfaction, integration with other functional members is especially important to their ability to perform their fundamental role; thus, CO is likely to motivate salespeople to interact or collaborate with other functional members.

H5. Customer orientation positively affects cross-functional integration.

(4) Research methodology

1. Sample and measure

This study was conducted in a company whose sales of individual services and products involved real state and auto and financial insurance. I chose this special company because its salespeople are motivated to accept SOCO approaches, and they are generally integrated with other functional members. In total, 382 questionnaires were distributed, and 236 salespeople, including sales managers, responded, reflecting a response rate of 61.78%. Scales for measuring SOCO, integration, and individual performance were adapted from previous research for this study. Likert scales, ranging from one to indicate “not at all” to five to indicate “a lot,” were used. Based on Wachner et al. (2009), SO was measured with a three-item index, as shown in Table 1. It is modified these measures from those used by Wachner et al. (2009) to reflect the short-term transactional emphasis on superior financial performance of SO. It is modified instruments drawn from those used by Thakor and Joshi (2005) to measure CO. In addition, integration with other functional members, which was referenced by Kahn and Mentzer (1998), is included. Finally,

individual performance was measured using two items developed by Churchill, Ford, Hartley, and Walker (1985) to emphasize the view of performance in the sales role. All items measured self-reported performance relative to other salespeople.

2. Results

2.1 Measurement model

The validity and dimensionality of our reflective constructs are assessed by performing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). CFA model addressed SO (three items, $\alpha = .706$), CO (four items, $\alpha = .732$), integration (four items, $\alpha = .835$), and performance (two items, $\alpha = .912$). The model showed an acceptable fit with the data, with a χ^2 value of 135.609 ($df = 59$, $p < .001$), a comparative fit index (CFI) of .941, an adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) of .872, and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .074. These data imply that the fit of the model was good. Item loadings are presented in Table 1. One item related to cross-functional integration had a low loading, $< .5$ is founded, it is accepted because it is necessary to directly estimate how salespeople perceive the possibility as to integrate with other functional members. Moreover, the overall composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) were strong for all latent variables, as shown in Table 2. Because the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than the correlation between any pair of constructs in the measurement model, all model constructs exhibited discriminant validity with respect to the standard.

In addition, a Harman’s one-factor tests performed on the four conceptually crucial

variables in our research model: SO, CO, cross-functional integration, and individual performance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Results from this test showed that four factors were present and that the most

covariance explained by one factor was 28.62%. This suggests that our data sample was most likely not contaminated by common method bias.

2.2. Structural model

To test hypotheses related to the structural

Table 1. Variables and measures

Scale items	Model Estimate*
<i>Sales orientation</i>	
SO1 when a company appraises salespeople, only financial performance has to be considered.	.474
SO2 I try to focus attention on the degree of sales performance compared with others	.828
SO3 high sales performance is more important than how to accomplish it	.657
<i>Customer orientation</i>	
CO1 It is important to fully understand the customer's needs	.573
CO2 I try to determine how I can satisfy customers	.794
CO3 I try to determine how I can best help the customer solve his/her problem	.674
CO4 I spend much of my time listening to the customer talk about his/her firm's needs	.557
<i>Cross-functional integration</i>	
CL1 the integration between sales and other functions is possible	.351
CL2 critical information is shared between colleagues with different functions	.901
CL3 I am actively gathering information from colleagues with different functions	.859
CL4 I frequently exchanges information with other functional members	.922
<i>Individual Performance</i>	
P1 the degree to which the salesperson commits to the target sales figure	.943
P2 the sales figures are achieved	.889

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations

	Composite reliability	AVE	1	2	3	4
1.Sales orientation	0.74	0.50	1			
2.Customer orientation	0.86	0.61	-.009	1		
3.Cross-functional integration	0.88	0.67	.034	.245**	1	
4.Individual performance	0.92	0.84	.285**	.074	.322**	1

Table 3. Structural model estimates

Structural paths		Path Estimate (<i>t</i> -value)
Sales orientation	→ Cross-functional integration	0.13(1.20)
Customer orientation	→ Cross-functional integration	0.67(3.37)***
Cross-functional integration	→ Individual performance	0.28(4.08)***
Sales orientation	→ Individual performance	0.63(5.11)***
Customer orientation	→ Individual performance	0.05(0.30)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; and *** $p < 0.001$

ral model, AMOS is used to examine model; the fits of the models ($\chi^2 = 135.609$, $d.f. = 59$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.941; TLI = 0.923; and RMSEA = 0.074) were good. In terms of the effects of direct paths, four of the six relationships directly supported three of our hypotheses as shown in Table 3. Specifically, H1, which addresses the direct effect of SO on individual performance, was supported. The parameter estimate for the path was 0.627 ($t = 5.112$). H5, which also addresses the direct effect of CO on cross-functional integration, was supported, and the parameter estimate for the path was 0.670 ($t = 3.365$). In addition, H3, which deals with the direct effect of cross-functional integration on individual performance, was supported, and the parameter estimate for the path was 0.284 ($t = 4.082$). The other two structural parameters were non-significant; therefore, H2 and H4 were not supported in our model.

(5) Discussion

1. Theoretical and managerial implications

This research investigated the impact of SOCO on the individual performance of salespeople because most extant research on

the sales motivation of salespeople has underscored the positive effects of CO and neglected the impact of SO. It is also studied the direct and mediating effects of integration with other functional members on individual performance. These findings contribute to existing knowledge about sales organization. First, this research clarified how and why SOCO affects individual performance by showing that cross-functional integration mediates the effects of CO on individual performance. A significant result is that SO directly increases sales performance, but that CO indirectly increases it by prompting interaction and activities with individuals with different areas of expert knowledge.

This finding underscores the differences between the two components of SOCO, although previous research has reported that both positively influence performance (e.g., Bole et al., 2001).

In terms of function, the relevant literature has shown that CO stimulate innovativeness and information sharing (Lukas and Ferrell, 2000). For example, Lukas and Ferrell (2000) empirically showed that CO increases the introduction of new-to-

the-world products and reduces the number of me-too products launched. Moreover, Foss et al. (2011) reported that interaction with customers promotes the increased internal communication through delegating responsibility in the organization. Our study advances knowledge in this regard by suggesting that CO increases the performance of salespeople through their innovative behavior, such as interacting with other functional members and improving the value of their products and services by adopting a variety of perspectives.

From this perspective, it is possible that these two psychological states will lead to different customer service and products. Services and products provided from CO are likely be more higher quality than those provided from SO, as the former involves efforts to achieve superior customer value that derive from a combination of different perspectives and areas of expertise. This expectation should be discussed in further research. Second, our study expands on prior research regarding cross-functional integration by showing that personal CO stimulates this phenomenon. Internal and external facilitators, such as reward procedures, top management support, and environmental uncertainty have been identified as antecedents to cross-functional integration (e.g., Rouziès et al., 2005; Guenzi and Trolo, 2006). This research advances knowledge in this domain by suggesting that CO is critical for upper-tier cross-functional integration on the individual level and that the antecedents of cross-functional integration should be further explored. Finally, considering that few studies have

been conducted outside the United States and it is possible that this behavior has different effects in other countries (Guenzi et al., 2011), this research on salespeople in an industrial company of Japan contributes to expanding the existing knowledge on SOCO and its consequences outside the United States.

Findings of this research have managerial implications for sales managers and marketing executives. They should encourage salespeople to adopt both selling approaches and to adapt their management style in terms of salesforce selection, training, motivation, reward, and control systems accordingly (Weitz and Bradford, 1999). Although the importance of shifting strategies from hard selling to smart selling has been asserted (Guenzi, 2011), salespeople are still expected to attain short-term sales results in a competitive market. Achievement of superior short-term performance requires that the work and training curriculum of salespeople be based on sales. This may be more critical for salespeople who naturally prioritize the long-term prospective customer over short-term compensation. At the same time, salespeople with a high SO should also be encouraged to increase their integration with other functional members, such as R&D, marketing, and manufacturing personnel. For example, the use of cross-functional teams with common financial goals may be effective in this regard (Rouziès et al., 2005). In summary, sales managers must coach and support salespeople in attempts to maintain high levels of both components of SOCO and facilitate opportunities for salespeople, especially those with high SO, to interact with colleagues with different knowledge

bases.

2. Limitations and future research

Examinations of the additional conditions that reduce the negative dimension of SO and increase motivation for short-term performance will be critical. Although SO has a positive effect on individual performance as our findings suggest, it also presents considerable challenges, such as reducing customer loyalty, endangering the job satisfaction of salespeople, and fostering low levels of learning orientation (Boles et al., 2001; Schwepker, 2003; Harries et al., 2005); thus, this topic requires more discussion and careful consideration. Moreover, we used individual performance as the consequence of SOCO, which was measured by self-assessments completed in terms of comparison with colleagues. Future research should rely on objective data, which may be more effective for estimating individual effectiveness because it is likely that workers to do not have accurate information about their colleagues' performance.

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