

SELF-MONITORING AND EMPATHY AS DETERMINANTS OF SALES PERFORMANCE FOR INDUSTRIAL SALES PERSONNEL UTILIZING SALES DATA AND MANAGERIAL RATINGS

JAMES RICKS, Southeast Missouri State University

JOHN FRAEDRICH, Southern Illinois University - Carbondale

C. XIONG, Southeast Missouri State University

Trait and script theories are used in discussing how effective sales people are using empathy and self-monitoring skills in the workplace. Results of actual sales data suggest that sales people with high self-monitoring skills have higher probabilities of success. However, managerial ratings support a variation of these conclusions. Also, sales personnel with empathy as an interactive factor with self-monitoring appear to have a higher probability of success among the sales personnel studied. Implications are discussed along with suggestions for sales management strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Within the current literature, several factors have been suggested as influencers of the performance of salespeople including role perceptions, motivation, and personal ability. While considerable research has focused on role perceptions and motivation, few have addressed the variable of personal ability (Weitz, et al. 1986). Personal ability has been associated with trait theory in that people have consistent habits for behaving across situations. These habits are operationalized through the use of personality traits (Cronbach 1970; Greenberg and Greenberg 1976; Lamont and Lundstrom 1977; Nelson and Gilbertson 1991). One such trait is self-monitoring. One of trait theory's core assumptions is that people have both the ability and inclination to exercise control over their behavior (Caldwell and O'Reilly 1982; Fine and Gardial 1990; Halfercamp 1989; Mills 1984; Spiro 1990). Spiro and Weitz (1990) argue the importance of trait theory in adaptive selling.

Another theory utilized within sales is scripting or script theory. Script theory postulates that when a cognitive structure (script) is activated, it directs sales behavior (Heald and Heald 1991; Leigh and Rethans 1984). Scripts guide the actions and expectations of salespeople during the selling sequence. When a salesperson encounters a familiar sales situation, a previously encoded script or cognitive sequence helps guide actions and responses which reflect similar encounters. Scripts are not equivalent to adaptability. Individuals who have the skills to adapt scripts should be more effective than those with canned presentations that lock out adaptation.

Personal ability has been associated with trait theory in that people exhibit consistent behaviors across situations. Such habitual behaviors are operationalized as personality traits (Cronbach 1970). The only linkage between trait and script theory is that a script is a consistent, habitual response to a consistent situation encountered in selling. One question that the literature asks is whether salespeople who rate more highly on empathy and self-monitoring may also be more inclined to practice scripting.

EMPATHY AND SELF-MONITORING

The trait empathy is defined as the sharing of the perceived emotions of another (Dugan 1978). Specifically, empathy is an affective state that stems from the appreciation of another's emotional state or condition that is congruent and similar to the perceived state of the other. Though similar to sympathy, an empathetic person understands another person's emotions and cognition's without agreeing with that emotion or being caught up by the emotion, whereas the sympathetic person cannot separate the two elements (Kringle 1989). The adaptive approach suggests that higher levels of empathy, which allow a salesperson to be more conscious of customer needs, will enable him/her to be more effective in selling, especially in long term relationships.

A second variable that may be related to sales success is self-monitoring. Self-monitoring is the sensitivity to scrutinize (control and manage) one's own expressions and self-presentations (Snyder 1979). Self-monitoring is derived from role-related theory processes and bears a kinship to impression-management theory (Shaw and Constanzo 1982). Individuals differ in their sensitivity or self-monitoring skill level. For example, high self-monitoring individuals invest considerable effort in noticing and mentally gathering information, then behaving toward others according to their readings of these interpersonal cues about appropriate behavior (Snyder 1979; 1987; Long, Dobbins, Dedrick, and Clemons 1990). High self-monitors, out of concern for the situation and interpersonal appropriateness of their social behaviors, use these cues from relevant others and the social environment as a guideline for regulating and controlling both verbal and nonverbal and self-monitoring skills which form a salesperson's mental script. This script is implemented and modified to the situation.

Castleberry, Sheperd, and David (1993) suggest script theory offers potential insight into the role memory plays in interpersonal listening, which is part of the sales adaptive process. Scripts are defined by them as knowledge structures containing selling events and action sequences. Sales in this system provide a series of temporal action sequences that

direct sales behavior. They assert that a number of other less understood intrinsic factors, including an empathic concern for the customer to a self-monitor's concern for his/her own self image, may influence the willingness of a salesperson to listen to the customer.

Empathy and self-monitoring are both traits that seem to relate to adaptability (Spiro and Weitz 1990). Weitz, Suja, and Suja (1986) as well as others indicate that adaptability is an important variable to sales success (Bozinoff 1982; Leigh and Rethans 1984; Rethans and Taylor 1982). However, little research has been done on the joint impact of empathy and self-monitoring on performance of salespeople. Our research evaluates empathy and self-monitoring in both outside sales and inside sales environments.

SELF-MONITORING AND SALES PERFORMANCE

Success in sales depends upon accurately uncovering needed information and converting it into persuasive interactions (Goolsby, Lagace, and Boorum 1992). Self-monitoring skills play an important role in such successes and adaptability. For example, high self-monitors are more skillful than low self-monitors in pacing (adaptability) conversations between pairs of subjects (Baron 1989). Additionally, low self-monitors do not have well-developed repertoires of self-presentation skills. The self-presentation of low self-monitors seems to be controlled from within by their affective states and attitudes rather than from cues present in the situation or environment.

Self-monitoring skills research has confirmed that high self-monitors are more attentive to information concerning the self-presentations of their peers than low self-monitors and are more likely to recall such information (Shaw and Constanzo 1982). Other studies have found that low self-monitors are not as vigilant in seeking information about others and, thus, this information does not affect their own behavior (Snyder 1987). As a result, Halfecamp (1989) discovered that self-monitoring theory describes individual differences to the extent to

which people rely on social comparison information for adapting their behaviors to social situations. This ability to adapt should correlate with high and low subgroups. High self-monitoring also leads to greater adaptability, which should increase sales effectiveness. Therefore it is hypothesized that:

H₁: Salespeople who are high self-monitors perform better than salespeople who are low self-monitors based on overall sales volume.

The ability to monitor and manage one's perception by the customer and perceive a customer's thinking can also help a salesperson's selling effectiveness. Being more aware of customer needs and expectations can render a salesperson more capable of developing rapport and establishing long term relationships.

Empathy Interacts with Self-monitoring

A number of demographic variables have been found to impact the effectiveness of empathy. For example, the intervening factors of gender (Futrell 1984), race-ethnicity (Abramms-Mezoff and Johns 1989), age (Gable 1988; Gable, Holland, and Dangelo 1984) and birth-order (Boone and Kurtz 1988), have been found to impact empathy. Research also suggests that the role of empathy is less important than self-monitoring in sales performance. Spiro and Weitz (1990) list self-monitoring first among the adaptive selling factors with Goolsby, Lagrace, and Boorum (1992) indicating that self-monitoring, androgyny, and intrinsic orientation were positively related to sales performance.

McIntyre, Wheatley, and Wuhr (1996) state that further research on adaptive selling and psychological factors such as self-monitoring should enhance sales training. Marshall (1996), using ADAPTS scales, suggests that the influence of empathy and self-monitoring deserve further attention in adaptive selling. Marks, Vorhies, Badovick, and Gordon (1996) also conclude that several traits including self-monitoring are not equal in their impact on sales performance. Finally, Bowers, Martin, and Luker (1990) conclude that the self-monitoring scale could be used to screen

applicants for customer contact positions. It is also possible that self-monitoring may have more effect than some other traits. Because empathy and self-monitoring may interact in their effect on adaptability, it is hypothesized that:

H₂: Empathy interacts with self-monitoring such that high self-monitor salespeople possessing low empathy will perform better than low self-monitors with high empathy. This is based on sales volume.

Situation context is also considered to be a significant factor. The nature of a sales environment entails the customer sometimes approaching the salesperson. This suggests that salespeople may need to be able to relate more readily to the needs and expectations of their customers as they will have little preparation for some customers' sales interactions. A successful sales encounter could require managing communications with the customer and impressions immediately. Thus:

H₃: Empathy interacts with self-monitoring such that high self monitor salespeople possessing low empathy will perform better than low self-monitors with high empathy. This is measured using managerial ratings.

These three hypothesis taken together establish the centrality of self-monitoring to adaptive sales performance success.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Surveys were administered to salespeople and sales managers in both inside and outside industrial sales settings. Salespeople from the auto parts and advertising industry located in the Southeastern U.S. and Midwest were sampled. As the survey was lengthy (one half hour), respondents were compensated to participate (ten dollars). Of six hundred and thirty-seven surveys, two hundred and twenty-five were usable for a response rate of 35.3 percent.

Self-monitoring was measured using Lennox and Wolf's (1984) scale. Scale reliability was .77 for

ability to modify self-presentation, .70 for sensitivity to expressive behavior of others, and .75 for the total scale.

A five-point Likert-type scale developed by Davis (1980) was used to operationalize empathy. The multidimensional empathy measure used nine different independent criteria to validate the test. Different norms by gender were used to compensate for the normal advantage women culturally have in this trait. The sales coefficient was 0.71.

The dependent variable, sales performance, was measured by two means. Sales volume and unit sales data provided by subject companies were standardized to arrive at a uniform rating, referred to as sales volume. A second sales performance variable was developed by using management ratings of performance (Westhuizen 1993). The two indices were used to encompass both objective performance and on-the-job behavior.

Salespeople were divided into high and low groups for self-monitoring and empathy. The groupings were developed based on norms published by the developers of the measures (Davis 1980; Lennox and Wolf 1984). The salespeople were divided into high/low (self-monitoring by empathy) subgroups. Four such groups were developed (i.e., high self monitor/high empathy, high self monitor/ low empathy, low self monitor/high empathy, low self monitor/low empathy). Similar groupings have been proposed by Blau and Boal (1987) and tested by Ingram, Lee, and Lee (1991).

MANCOVA (2 x 3 between-subjects on sales volume and managerial ratings) was selected because it permits simultaneous testing of differences among groups on multiple dependent variables (Hair et al. 1992). Multi-variate analysis of covariance was used to evaluate differences in performance (both indices) by self-monitoring, empathy, and an interaction variable (self monitor by empathy). The procedure allows for the removal of extraneous influences (moderating or intervening factors) upon the dependent variables. In addition, a conventional MANOVA was done on the adjusted dependent variable. Demographic variables were controlled by

the use of MANCOVA as well. Analysis of variance was employed to evaluate differences between high and low groups by sample for both self-monitoring and empathy.

Scores from the data collected were standardized and dichotomized using standards for high and low (self-monitoring and empathy) based on test instruments rather than a simple division of the midpoint. The dichotomy decision was based on high and low scores established on thoroughly developed norms, rather than on a particular sample. As a result, the scores are based on what the construct being measured represents theoretically, instead of a statistical decision based on a particular group's frequency distribution. A median split was not used because salespeople in a particular environment or industry maybe higher or lower in a specific trait and would have resulted in obscuring the relevant factor.

Stochastic ordering was used to determine reliability. This was necessary to compare sales performance across varying industries with greatly varying sales in dollar volume levels. PROC GLM/SAS was used to determine whether the higher level of self-monitoring and empathy were consistent with the higher level of sales volume. The results show that at a low empathy level, a high self-monitoring level gives a significantly higher sales volume with the sales volume (ranking) difference being as much as three times (0.422 - 1.267). By averaging the levels of empathy, we found that higher self-monitoring levels significantly increase the sales volume (ranking). At a self-monitoring level one, empathy level two gives a difference on sales volume than empathy level one (P -value=0.0572). It was also found that the sales volume distribution at self-monitoring level two is stochastically larger than that at self-monitoring level one which means that the sales volume at self-monitoring level two has a higher (or at least the same) probability to take values larger than any specified level of sales volume than at self-monitoring level one.

The measures of self-monitoring used indicate significant levels of reliability for sales volume

Self-monitoring and Empathy

rankings with the empathy measures showing marginal reliability for sales volume. High and low self-monitoring is a statistically reliable measure of sales volume.

Table 1 relates descriptive statistics for the variables used in the study by sample and for a pooled sample. Self-monitoring has a significant Pearson ($r=0.5861$) correlation with sales volume. The analyses of the data suggest that Hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported. Utilizing both dependent variables, self-monitoring has the strongest correlation with high levels of sales success (volume). The data also reveals that self-monitoring is more important than empathy for sales success. An F-test with the strongest dependent variable sales volume and self-monitoring alone was significant; however, with sales volume and empathy alone it was not (See Table 5).

The Roy Bargman Stepdown F-test revealed that sales volume was more predicable than managerial ratings with self-monitoring to be the most powerful independent variable (See Table 3 and 4). In addition, the ANOVA procedure, which used only one dependent variable at a time, revealed that self-monitoring is highly predictive of sales volume success yet no such relationship existed for managerial ratings. Our results suggest that self-monitoring contributes more to predictability than managerial ratings and has significant interactive effects.

Table 1
MANCOVA Sample Means
For Volume of Merchandise Sold

INDUSTRIAL SALESPERSONS'			
SELF-MONITORING			
LOW		HIGH	
Empathy		Empathy	
Low Empathy A	High Empathy B	Low Empathy C	High Empathy D
3.000	2.7777	3.3636	2.8333
Entire Sample Mean 2.7407			

Hypothesis 2 was also supported by the volume of merchandise sold. (Cells C>B). Hypothesis 3 is not supported in that managerial rankings do not follow the appropriate patterns and thereby sales volume

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appears to be the most important variable. Managerial Ratings have B>C and the difference is statistically highly significant. See Table 5. Relative to the personality variables of empathy and self-monitoring, the data suggests that high empathy has a reverse role for industrial salespeople. High empathy only benefitted industrial salespeople in the form of better ratings from management.

Table 2
MANCOVA Sample Means
For Overall Managerial Ratings

INDUSTRIAL SALESPERSONS'			
SELF-MONITORING			
LOW		HIGH	
Empathy		Empathy	
Low Empathy A	High Empathy B	Low Empathy C	High Empathy D
48.7693	54.6666	47.8181	50.8333
Entire Sample Mean 49.5916			

However, overall salespersons' selling performance is benefitted by high self-monitoring skills. After adjusting for differences on covariates, sales volume did make a significant contribution between high and low personality scores. Both MANCOVA and ANOVA analyses indicate the power of self-monitoring on volume of merchandise sold and its importance to adaptive selling.

As with all research, certain limitations exist which include the nature and size of the sample, and the management bias. A convenience sampling method was utilized in determining the firms that participated and a gratuity was given to each respondent. As a result, some degree of self selection of personality types may have occurred. Those who were less altruistic or more materialistic may have self-selected themselves to be in the project or if their time was worth more than the gratuity, self selected themselves out of the study. Finally, a national survey was not used, hence some caution should be used when extrapolating to all sales groups.

Table 3
MANCOVA Analysis with Interactive Effects

MANCOVA			
Wilks Lambda		F	Significance of F
		3.0172	P = .051*
UNIVARIATE F TEST			
Variable		F	P Significance of F
Sales Volume		4.2492	P = .04*
Overall Managerial Rating		0.7556	P = .386
STEPDOWN F TEST			
Variable		F	Significance of F
Sales Volume		4.2492	P = .040
Overall Managerial Rating		1.7696	P = .185
INTERACTIVE EFFECTS			
Variable # & Names	Wilks	F	Significance of F
V9 BY 10 - Self-monitoring by Empathy	0.9751	2.668	0.072
V10 - Empathy	0.9959	0.4303	0.651
V9 - Self-Monitoring	0.9517	5.3012	.006*

Table 4
ANOVA Analysis of Variance with Interactive Effects

Independent Variable or Interaction of Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Significance of F	Dependent Variable	Significance of F
Self-monitoring	Sales Volume	0.000**	Managerial Rating	0.839
Empathy	Sales Volume	0.678	Managerial Rating	0.748
Interaction of Self-monitoring by Empathy	Sales Volume	0.094	Managerial Rating	0.33

IMPLICATIONS

Results indicate the centrality of self-monitoring above empathy for effective sales performance. The research conducted represents an important finding in suggesting that self-monitoring is, in part, a composite of traits that are important to adaptive sales performance success. In addition, unfiltered personalities (personalities which are not filtered or improved by self-monitoring) may not be as effective as others which do include self-monitoring. Empathy

is not always a positive factor even in combination with self-monitoring. The finding that empathy alone is not as strong a sales asset in all situations as previously believed is an important contribution to the marketing literature. Possibly in some environments empathy may discourage some sales closing stratagems. Further research is needed to clarify the value of empathy. Sales personnel who are trained in or possess high levels of both traits should have higher levels of sales productivity for most sales environments.

Table 5
F-Test Dependents and Independent Variables

SALES VOLUME		DEPENDENT VARIABLE
Independent Variable	F Value	Pr > F
Self-Monitoring	12.61	0.0005
Empathy	0.71	0.4005
Interaction	4.44	0.0363
MANAGERIAL RATINGS		
Independent Variable	F Value	Pr > F
Self-Monitoring	0.19	0.6654
Empathy	0.02	0.8928
Interaction	0.65	0.4218

Mean Cell T-Test Comparisons Sales Volume			
Hypothesis	Cells	T-Value	P-Value
1	DC > AB	7.00	.006
2	C > B	14.631	.0001
Mean Cell T-Test Comparisons Managerial Rating			
Hypothesis	Cells	T-Value	P-Value
3	C > B	17.851	0.0001

Finally, we found that the objective measure of success, sales volume, was better than managerial ratings (see Table 4). One implication for researchers might be that managerial ratings are possibly biased based on the personality of the two

parties involved; the manager and salesperson. Possibly high self-monitors may possess strong and controlled personalities which may be difficult to manage by others with similar personalities. Some managers may sense that they are being manipulated. Another speculative alternate view is that high self-monitors would use influence tactics to increase their managerial ratings (Wayne 1997). These efforts may be resisted by experienced managers. This study also suggests that managerial ratings may not be based predominantly on sales volume. Sales managers might conclude that their subordinates' duties include more than just selling.

Managerial Implications

The verification of the centrality of self-monitoring, an impression management trait, indicates the importance of communication/interaction skills on actual sales performance and inherent abilities. The correlations of selling success and high self-monitoring is of major significance for the selection and training of sales personnel. A thorough development of the parameters surrounding the positive influence of self-monitoring on sales performance is needed to operationalize this information. The development of such parameters should include the positive interaction of empathy.

The findings suggest that, depending upon customer profile and environment, sales managers and personnel directors should use self-monitoring and empathy screening tests. They should add these skills to training seminars objectives. Also the development of screening tests to aid in recruiting sales personnel should be further operationalized and investigated. These suggestions may not only improve sales but should also reduce turnover rates. The use of such a testing instrument in our research suggests that self-monitoring and empathy can be effectively evaluated with a pencil and paper test in an actual field setting. Determining whether or not self-monitoring and empathy can be significantly acquired or learned is of great potential value to industry. Trainers might consider developing modules to ascertain if and how these traits can be inculcated into their training regimen.

Management bias in dependent measures of sales success is another issue. Future research needs to develop other measures of overall sales performance that diminishes such managerial bias. The fact that sales volume results did not correlate with managerial ratings in some areas could indicate a significant bias among managers toward some of their subordinates. Further research should verify this study by using a national sample with additional variables. In addition, research methods could be altered to include other qualitative measures such as observational studies and focus group research on personality interactions with customers. Future studies could explore the same types of constructs using longer-term performance measures of success. These procedures may help researchers gain additional insights and perspectives. Also two separate studies, one for expensive and another for inexpensive products might be revealing. Can these traits become, like skills, learned or can training significantly increase one from a low self monitor to a high self-monitoring salesperson?

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