AN EXAMINATION OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION-RELATED SOCIAL COGNITIVE STRUCTURES IN ASSOCIATION WITH SELLING EFFECTIVENESS

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2009

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Despite sales being the lifeblood of the majority of organizations, the discussion of selling remains sparse in communication literature. Personal sales interactions remain an important but understudied topic in scholarly literature and are deserving of systematic and rigorous academic research. This project advocates the use of communication theory to inform personal selling. Based upon an interdisciplinary literature review, ten observations contributing to the importance of the study are provided.

Using Constructivism as the research orientation, cognitive differentiation, person-centered communication, self-monitoring, and organizational role perceptions were explored in relation to sales effectiveness for this study. Overall, the fundamental link between communication and sales performance was supported by the findings. Top performing sales representatives were found to have significantly higher scores for persuasive ability, person-centered communication, self-monitoring, and organizational role in comparison to their peers. However, cognitive complexity was not found to be significantly related to sales performance.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous help of others. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to some individuals who challenged, encouraged, and inspired my work.

My thanks and appreciation goes to my advisor, Dr. Melissa Spirek, who has been my “bulldog” advisor. Dr. Spirek has been a great mentor and proponent of my work. I thank her for staying on this project even though she switched universities. She and I are in agreement that working on problems and ideas with bright and talented people is a true joy of academia.

I want to thank the members of my dissertation committee for generously giving their time and expertise to better this project. The contributions and support of this committee will undoubtedly have a lasting impact my current and future scholarship. Dr. Terry Rentner has been a favorite professor for both my wife and I. Her scholarship of engagement is an inspiration to my work. Dr. Canchu Lin has been instrumental in providing me with a solid base within organizational communication. Further, I thank him for his guidance and stimulating conversation both at Bowling Green State University and at past NCA conferences. I want to thank Dr. Karen Johnson-Webb for her work as an outside committee member. Her rigorous examination of my proposal was both helpful and greatly appreciated. I owe many thanks to Dr. Michael Waltman for graciously serving as an outside committee member to my dissertation. I have been honored by willingness to lend his expertise in Constructivism, guidance, and overall kindness throughout this project.

I must acknowledge the many friends, colleagues, students, teachers, and other individuals who have assisted, advised, and supported my research and writing efforts over the years. I would like to thank all the talented faculty and staff of the School of Communication...
Studies at Bowling Green State University for providing me with such a wonderful opportunity to pursue a doctorate. Thank you for funding and selection as a non-service fellow for this project. Special thanks to Interim Vice Provost Dr. Deanna Snively for her assistance processing paperwork with the Graduate College. A thank you to sales guru Neil Rackham for the unique opportunity to learn a great deal about personal selling as a former consultant at one of his firms. I also appreciate his thoughtful correspondence at the onset of this project. I want to also thank mentors Dr. Ken Cutright, Dr. Hugh Sherman, and Dr. Paul Nelson currently and formerly at Ohio University for the lasting effects of their wise advice and support. They are gentleman scholars who serve as my role models.

I wish to thank all the participants from Mary Kay, Inc. who contributed to this project. Specifically, I want to thank Teresa Maynard and Brenda Segal for granting me access to their group of sales representatives. I would like to thank my father-in-law, Bob Scholl, for providing the introduction with Teresa Maynard. I also thank him for his encouragement and overall support of this project.

I am especially grateful to my family for all of the love, support, encouragement, and resources they have provided supporting my educational pursuits. My parents, Randy and Julie Meredith, always stressed the importance of education and have made great sacrifices to help me reach for my aspirations. They have supported me with unconditional love and patience. My sister, Melinda Meredith, not only contributed by being a coder for this project but has been a great source of inspiration. She is a bright and wonderful colleague in the professorate. I want to also thank my late grandfather, Dick Callihan, for being among the first people to encourage me to go for a doctorate. He was an ardent supporter of my education and a good friend.
I owe thanks to my wonderful wife, Lyndsey Meredith. Lyndsey is my love, muse, and anchor. She has helped me during the writing process by coding, editing, and acting as a sounding board for my ideas. While working on this project, we experienced many amazing life changing moments together. Among other things, we were engaged and married, honeymooned in Italy, moved twice, worked full time jobs, rescued pets, and are currently expecting our first child. She consistently helps me keep perspective on what is most important in life. Lynds brings me happiness every day with her smiles, words, laughs, ideas, and support. I look forward to each moment we spend together.

To our upcoming son and our future children, we look forward to sharing our lives with you. I hope you have the same opportunities to be inspired by family, peers, mentors, and colleagues. Reach toward your aspirations and find joy in the continuous pursuit of knowledge. Thank God for your blessings, try to do the right thing, and remember to have fun. Your mother and I will always love you very much.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualizing Personal Selling</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Brief Historical Perspective of Personal Selling</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicating the Need for Studying Personal Selling within Organizational Contexts</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Personal Selling Scholarship from a Communicative Perspective</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Sales Success in Personal Selling</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive Selling and Customer Orientation</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Cognition and the Cognitive Selling Paradigm</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance-Gaining</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivism, Cognitive Complexity, and Communication-Related Abilities</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Complexity and Person-centered Persuasive Communication</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of Social Cognition in Organizations</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and Same-Sex Research in Constructivism</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Justifications and Proposed Research Questions</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGY</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Methodology</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Considerations for Using Women Only as Participants ............................................ 75
Participating Organization .......................................................................................... 76
Participants .................................................................................................................. 77
Procedure ..................................................................................................................... 78
Measures ....................................................................................................................... 79
Cognitive Differentiation......................................................................................... 79
Persuasive Flexibility and Listener-Adaptive
Communication................................................................................................... 80
Self-Monitoring......................................................................................................... 82
Organizational Role Differentiation ....................................................................... 84
Sales Performance..................................................................................................... 85
CHAPTER III. RESULTS ......................................................................................... 86
Interpersonal Cognitive Differentiation and Selling
Performance ............................................................................................................. 87
Person-Centered Persuasive Ability and Selling
Performance ............................................................................................................. 87
Revised Self-Monitor Rating and Selling Performance.............................................. 88
Perception of Organizational Roles and Selling
Performance ............................................................................................................. 88
Relationship between Social Cognitive and
Communication-Related Abilities ............................................................................. 90
CHAPTER IV. DISCUSSION .................................................................................. 92
Limitations and Considerations ................................................................................. 97
Future Research Directions ................................................................. 99

Conclusion ............................................................................................. 101

REFERENCES ................................................................................................. 104

APPENDIX 1. STUDIES FROM A COMMUNICATION

APPENDIX 2. SALES PROCESS MODELS ..................................................... 140

APPENDIX 3. COGNITIVE MODELS RELATING TO

“OTHERING” AND CUSTOMER INTERPRETATION .................................... 144

APPENDIX 4. THE TWO-ROLE VERSION OF THE RCQ .............................. 152

APPENDIX 5. PERSON-CENTERED MESSAGE SCENERIO ........................ 155

APPENDIX 6. LENNOX & WOLFE’S REVISED

SELF-MONITORING SCALE ........................................................................... 157

APPENDIX 7. ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE PERSPECTIVE .............................. 160
LIST OF FIGURES/TABLES

Figure                                      Page
1  Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan’s (1986) Adaptive Selling Framework ...................................... 31
3  Wilson (1977) Stages in Making a Sale ......................................................................... 140
4  Weitz (1978) ISTEA Sales Process Model ..................................................................... 141
5  Weitz (1981) Contingency Model of Salesperson Effectiveness .................................... 143
6  Williams, Spiro, & Fine (1990) Customer-Salesperson Interaction
   Model ............................................................................................................................... 146
7  Robinson, Farris, Wind (1967) Buying Decision Grid .................................................. 147
9  Friestad & Wright (1994) Persuasion Knowledge Model ............................................. 150
10 Process Model of Consumers’ Use of Persuasive Knowledge ....................................... 151

Table
1  Respondent Frequencies of Organizational Role Themes
    or Categories ..................................................................................................................... 90
2  Pearson Correlation Matrix for Social Cognitive and
    Communication-Related Abilities .................................................................................. 91
3  Studies from a Communication Perspective Examining
    Personal Selling ............................................................................................................. 137
An Examination of Individual Differences in Communication-Related Social Cognitive Structures in Association with Selling Effectiveness

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The quest for understanding individual differences between successful versus less successful salespeople has in many ways been considered the holy grail of personal selling research. The discipline of personal selling is young but developing. It is not surprising therefore that the sales discipline finds itself at an important crossroads. Imperative to this crossroads is the need for theoretical advancements by the scholarly community. The field of communication, in particular, holds promise.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates over 14 million Americans are employed in sales and related disciplines (http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm) yet the sales literature is identified as underdeveloped (e.g., Stewart, 2006). Research targeting a better understanding of personal selling has implications for theorists, practitioners, and students seeking employment within sales. Further, some scholars argue no single job type is more important to the success or failure of a business than that of personal selling because sales representatives represent the company to customers and are critical relationship builders (e.g., Anderson & Huang, 2006).

Exploring possible cognitive and communicative differences can significantly assist organizations interested in utilizing sales forces to hire and train employees, support theorists to develop a more accurate picture of the selling process, and provide students with more effective instruction prior to entering sales-related career fields. To this end, cutting-edge research in sales and marketing has begun to examine the cognitive
aspects of sales representatives. However, communication theory offers a largely untapped stream of research relating to cognition that could prove fruitful if added to sales scholarship. Despite the phenomena of personal selling being described as a largely communicative process (Williams & Spiro, 1985), only a relative handful of communication scholars have attempted to examine personal selling. Studying personal selling is an important undertaking for communication scholars considering that sales representatives have been identified as being among the most important communicators in a business organization (Nontarantonio & Cohen, 1990).

This dissertation attempts to contribute to the knowledge base of personal selling and interpersonal communication theory within organizational settings by embracing a constructivist research orientation. More specifically, this research seeks to uncover ways individual sales representatives differ in their effectiveness in relation to individual aspects of social cognition and communicative-related abilities. In addition, this study further advocates the application of communication theory toward the development of the academic sales literature.

Conceptualizing Personal Selling

Personal selling is defined by Weitz, Castleberry, and Tanner (2004) as an interpersonal process whereby a seller tries to uncover and satisfy a buyer’s needs in a mutually, long-term beneficial manner suitable for both parties. From a seller’s standpoint, personal selling is an act in a persuasive episode involving persuasive communication. Similarly, Marone and Lunsford (2005) describe personal selling as being characterized by a mutual, two-way flow of information between a buyer and seller about a good or service or a combination of both. Personal selling is differentiated from
other sales and marketing channels like telemarketing, catalogs, and the internet because it involves face-to-face communication (Soldow & Thomas, 1984). When increasing numbers of companies are attempting to build deep, meaningful, and long-term relationships with their customers, personal selling is the only communication vehicle that allows a marketing message to be adapted and tailored to the specific needs, wants, and beliefs of the individual (Weitz, 1978; Spiro & Weitz, 1990). Consultative selling, value-added selling, professional selling, needs satisfaction selling, customer-oriented selling, strategic selling, relationship selling, solution selling, and partnering are all terms commonly used in congruence, and often interchangeably, to describe the personal selling process (Marone & Lunsford, 2005). In sum, what is particularly salient to note for this investigation is that personal selling involves interpersonal, two-way communication between a buyer and seller whereby the seller employs persuasive communication regarding a goods and/or services.

Personal selling depends on successful interpersonal communication and is the most basic activity for the sales representative during personal selling exchanges (Williams & Spiro, 1985). Personal selling is a social situation involving two persons in a communication dyad (Evans, 1963) and success results in how well both parties achieve a common understanding that will enable mutual goal fulfillment through social interaction (Webster, 1968). A sales representative’s presentation efforts are especially important whereby “good presentations” are more effective than “poor presentations” especially for complex, new products as well as presentations from sales representations from lesser-known organizations (Levitt, 1967).
With personal selling, individual sales people represent the organization and “beat the streets” to sell the organization’s goods or services to potential customers. Oakes (1990) describes this type of a sale as typically being face-to-face between the customer and sales representative and involves a multi-phased sales process that includes recruiting and qualifying prospects, interviewing potential customers, closing the sale, and providing service to clients. Among the important communication interactions in which a sales representative may engage include collecting information about a prospective customer, developing a sales strategy based on information, transmitting messages to implement organizational strategy, evaluating the impact of these messages, and making adjustments based on this evaluation (Weitz, 1978). The ability to customize and tailor messaging, as well as developing relationships with customers is where the concept of “personal selling” is derived. The opportunity to tailor-make presentations for each selling situation and customer is an advantage unique to personal selling (Sujan, Weitz, & Sujan, 1988).

A Brief Historical Perspective of Personal Selling

The act of communicating for the purposes of exchanging goods and services has occurred since the early stages of the human race. Around 10,000 years B.C., the forging and gathering activities of men were set aside as less profitable by the discovery of agriculture and planned production created shortage and surplus / supply and demand (Powers, Martin, Rushing, & Daniels, 1987). As people in ancient civilizations settled into culturally distinct groups, “peddlers” came out of the settlements who encompassed the selling and inventory-holding function of the modern merchant (Powers, et al., 1987). The Phoenicians, for example, were an early civilization that were entrepreneurial and
took great advantage of the development of water transportation to sell goods. Similar to a sales manager with a sales force, chief merchants would dock and send underlings door to door for a daily wage or commission (Powers, et al., 1987).

The ability to effectively interact with each other was identified as becoming increasingly important in governance, military, and civic society (Katula, 2003). For example, the ancient Greek culture understood skillful persuasion had great value in pushing one’s agenda in public life and was thus worthy of study (Katula & Murphy, 2003). The classical world experienced increases in regional and specialized selling, including functional specialization, laws governing conduct, monetary systems of exchange such as coinage, and a rise in the stature of the merchant salesperson (Powers, et al., 1987).

Adam Smith’s release of the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 is often given credit for formally establishing the examination of economics and those related issues revolving around creating revenues through the marketplace. During this time period, industry’s mechanical developments coincided with advances in sales and marketing. For example, Josiah Wedgewood, an English potter, developed many modern sales techniques during this period that includes sales management, field warehousing, showrooms, promotional samples, and pricing to penetrate new markets (Powers, et al., 1987).

The turn of the twentieth century saw rapid economic and technological advances. Also at this time, a great rise in the number, size, and power of organizations of many diverse kinds has been tabbed as the “organizational revolution” whereby business organizations began to flourish (Boulding, 1953). The beginning of the 20th century began to lay the foundations for the development of sales departments, sales
management, and the development of formal education devoted sales and sales management (Powers, Koehler, & Martin, 1988). Lambert (2008) offers a useful depiction of the evolution of sales eras described as follows:

- The era of sales science (1890-1920): focused on the transaction itself, defining sales systems, methods, and approaches; most learning about sales was informal.
- The era of sales process (1920-1945): focused on facilitating transactions one customer at a time and producing new methods to train sales representatives on repeatable sales processes; most learning for salespersons was done on the job.
- The sales relationship era (1945-1985): focused on the transaction decision and closing the sale; training focused on pre-closing activities and landing business deals.
- The sales technology era (1985-2005): focused on all transaction steps as technology helped speed up the salesperson’s reaction times to market trends, awareness of industry news, and develop a better understanding of clients.
- The sales competency era (2003-present): focuses on the buying experience and is built on a salesperson’s competence for building relationships, solving problems, and bringing true value to the client, not just winning the sale.

In terms of accumulating sales knowledge, sales-based books have been a vibrant topic in popular literature. Authors, typically practitioners in nature, have offered a variety of sales techniques, principles of sales success, and motivational messages to help guide sales efforts. For example, Dale Carnegie’s (1981) techniques for handling people,
originally published in 1936, still remains a popular book for salespeople due to its practical advice toward developing relationships, communicating, and selling. W. Clement Stone, Napoleon Hill, and Elmer G. Leterman are responsible for a number of popular books involving the qualities of salespeople that boast results in successful selling. Cypert (1991) compiled Stone’s principles of those of sales representative’s attitude, personal attributes (e.g., initiative), fraternal orientation, intellectual properties, and spiritual beliefs. Hill’s books advocate harnessing the power of the mind and positive attitude (e.g., Hill, 1960; Hill & Stone, 1987). Leterman suggest ways of being creative with selling and sales interactions (Leterman, 1955; 1957; 1964), advocating the development of showmanship (Leterman, 1966), and overcoming customer rejection (Leterman, 1976). In a similar vein, Norman Vincent Peale’s principles for positive thinking and mental attitude have also been popular for salespeople. More recent popular books often advocate sales techniques based on asking strategic questions during sales interactions (e.g., Hopkins, 1982; Ziglar, 1984; Rackham, 1988; Ziglar, 1991; Freese, 1999). While this is just a few notable popular authors in the genre, what all of these books have in common is an emphasis on becoming a more effective sales representative by providing recommendations for improving handling the interpersonal aspects of personal selling with customers.

Interestingly, while being a vibrant topic in popular literature, sales has received comparatively little attention from scholars and continues to be largely underrepresented in university curricula and research in this domain has fallen behind other areas (Jones, Brown, Zoltners, & Weitz, 2005; Stewart, 2006). This is at least partially because studying selling and sales management within the academy is relatively young. In 1902,
the first college courses relating to selling were offered but the early courses did not have the widespread impact on the profession because they did not adequately address the needs of business (Powers, Koehler, & Martin, 1988). While Churchill, Ford, Hartley, and Walker (1985) identified sales scholarship from as early as 1918, Fine (2007) states the study of personal selling started in earnest during the 1970s. In fact, *The Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, the specialized academic journal for sales and sales management, has only been published for 26 years (Fine, 2007). Similarly, the more prominent publications of the allied discipline of marketing, *The Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of Marketing Research*, have only been in circulation for 71 years and 43 years, respectively (www.marketingpower.com).

Explicating the Need for Studying Personal Selling within Organizational Contexts

A more complete understanding of personal selling interactions is important for many capitalistic corporations in the ever changing global economy. Today, these corporations are evolving so as to compete within expanding world markets. Operating within business markets, increasingly characterized as changing into more open and global systems, sales organizations are facing both challenges and opportunities to attract customers and build brands. As managers are being asked to “think globally and act locally,” organizational members must align the strategy, structure, and corporate culture of operations (Dalton, Ernst, Deal, & Leslie, 2002).

In modern times, organizations have been identified as an important part of societal existence and reliant on effective interpersonal relationships (e.g., Boulding, 1953; Argyris, 1962). For profit-seeking organizations, the infusion of capital plays an essential role in the continued existence and functioning of organizational health. The
primary activity for most market-driven companies is generating profits and shareholder value from sales initiatives. As capitalist societies change focus from production to consumption orientations, corporations are moving toward controlling this consumption by attempting to get people to consume through marketing functions (Ritzer, 2005). As a result, companies have an increased interest in developing national and international long-term relationships with suppliers and customers through the use of an organizational sales force.

The role of salespeople in establishing and maintaining relationships with customers has become increasingly complex. Markets are in flux. Knowledge assets and intellectual capital are determining organizational and market success (Stewart, 2001). Technology and culture are changing business economies in completely new and increasingly fragmented ways where consumers have almost endless choices (Anderson, 2006).

Even with the globalization of the economy in terms of profits, personal relationships still matter for many businesses. In efforts to best facilitate personal interactions with customers, many profit-seeking organizations utilize a sales force. Thus, due to the sales force’s direct link to sales via customer interaction and the high expense involved in training and maintaining the sales force, company profitability is greatly influenced by sales force effectiveness (Zottiners, Sinha, Lorimer, 2004).

Organizational members that engage in personal selling initiatives play a vital role in the overall success or failure of businesses. The personal sales interaction is key to both being competitive and spurring consumption for organizations and economies
existing in capitalistic markets (Korczynski, 2005). As such, the success of personal selling efforts of an organization determines the economic health of the company. Utilizing a sales force to sell products is a strategic decision by an organization because of the wide-range of sales channel options that exist for selling products and services. Channel choices include, but are not limited to, sales partners (e.g., distributors, resellers), stores, catalogs, and the Internet. Many organizations decide to sell utilizing a mix of multiple sales channels in attempts to maximize reach to current and/or potential customers. Rackham and DeVencentis (1999) point out customers are attaching increased importance to a seller’s interaction approach which can include transactional (e.g., a more simplistic sales situation such as a non-complex product or a re-buy situation), consultative (e.g., complex products), and enterprise/partnering, whereby the latter two are typically more ideal for appropriately utilizing the sales representative’s ability to tailor communication versus other types of sales channels that are more suited for transactional selling. Thus, sales forces are particularly well-suited toward the acquisition and retention of customers because they can provide two-way communication with clients, can customize the product offering and message to a customer’s specific needs and buying process, can create relationships with customers and other partners, and can act as an important information gathering resource for the firm (Zoltners, Sinha, & Lorimer, 2004). Salespeople are on the front lines for organizations, are in the best vantage point identifying market trends, and need to be nurtured by organizational leaders as important information gathers (Liu & Comer, 2007) as many salespeople do understand the importance of information to the organization itself (Klompmaker, 1980).
While maintaining a sales force is generally the most expensive sales channel to utilize (Friedman & Furey, 1999), a sales force in turn also has the advantage of being the most consultative and adaptive sales channel option (Weitz, 1978; Friedman & Furey, 1999). The value attached to a sales representative’s personal contact with the customer often makes using a sales force the most effective method for making a sale (Sujan, Weitz, & Sujan, 1988). This is because salespeople are able to interact with potential clients through one-on-one interactions, typically have the most expert knowledge about the good or service being sold, and are generally more committed to selling the product.

Researchers contend that successful interpersonal relationships in marketing efforts are important for building trust and commitment for business transactions (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Heide, 1994; Zhao & Cavusgil, 2006). Some researchers warn not all businesses rely on interpersonal relationships but rather focus on high quality and consistent offerings (e.g., Iyer, Sharma, Evanschitzky, 2006). This is fascinating given that personal selling offers the richest communication option through face-to-face interactions. Personal selling allows for consultation and the asking and answering of questions (Schuster & Danes, 1986; Rackham, 1988). While there is no one right way for organizational leaders to bring a product to market, what is essential is that the sales channel aligns with customer preferences while being cost effective (Friedman & Fury, 1999). For many organizations selling complex products, relationships, and solutions, personal selling is a necessity for market penetration and expansion. Managers of market-driven firms must understand their customer’s preferences and ensure they make the most of their sales force (Leigh & Marshall, 2001). Thus, organizational managers must utilize their sales forces in a more effective manner.
that creates customer value rather than acting simply as transmitters of information and order takers (Rackham & De Vincentis, 1999).

In turn, the role of the sales representative is both burgeoning and often becoming more ambiguous. The fundamental task of the sales representative typically involves, finding customers, winning customers, and keeping customers. These tasks do not include the various other sales activities of the sales representative is expected to perform that include but are not limited to technology usage, meetings, travel, client entertaining and the various other expectations that come with many sales jobs across industries (Moncrief, Marshall, & Lassk, 2006). Since the sales representative acts in an intermediary or “boundary-spanning” capacity, salespeople have to cope with multiple and sometimes incompatible expectations from the customer and management and may create role conflict and ambiguity for the sales representative (Churchill, Ford, Hartley, & Walker, 1985; Jaramillo, Mulki, & Solomon, 2006; Miao & Evans, 2007). Sales performance research continues to be an important topic because salespeople have been shown to exhibit a wider range in performance outcomes than almost any other organizational job type, an inability to explain variance in the construct persists, and sales related research continues to have high managerial relevance (Plouffe & Barclay, 2007).

Organizational leaders deciding to utilize a sales force must do so carefully because of the importance of job to the organization and the high cost of developing and maintaining sales personnel.

Much work is left to be done in the continued development of personal selling scholarship. Due to the high stakes of the sales interaction, the high costs of training and maintaining a sales force, and the intrinsic need for the influx of capital within the
organization, garnering an understanding of effective and ineffective sales efforts has been a leading pursuit of scholars studying personal selling (Fine, 2007). In addition, with the increased emphasis on and changing environment of the sales landscape, the sales force’s role as critical ambassadors of the organization, important mouthpieces and representatives toward the formation of organizational identities, and active boundary-spanners linking companies to customers’ needs to be examined through scholarship.

A sales representative acts as a trained face and ambassador of the organization promoting its goods and services in the hopes of gaining sales in a direct, one-on-one fashion. A sales representative acts as an important go-between for the organization and customer. In fact, Smith (1987) states that all of the responsibilities of a sales representative boil down to representing the company to the customer and representing the customer to the company. In performing these tasks, Jones, Brown, Zoltners, and Weitz (2005) state salespeople need to essentially become “social scientists capable of analyzing lines of power and influence across blurring boundaries in order to sell in today’s business environment” (p. 108). This act of analyzing within and across the boundaries of the organization the sales representative represents and organizations to which he or she is attempting to sell goods and services to is sometimes referred to as boundary spanning.

As Tushman and Scanlan (1981a) point out, boundary spanners are an important linking mechanism between organizations in terms of defining and interpreting beliefs, roles, and differences through communication and are also important sources of information for an organization by interacting with other individuals within the organization, itself. Informational boundary spanning occurs in a two-step process
whereby individuals are able to gather information and disseminate it to their colleagues (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981b). Further, boundary spanning individuals play an important role of helping other internal units and external organizations understand the norms, values, and language associated with his or her work unit (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981b).

As noted above, salespeople are a pivotal link for the organization in terms of serving customers and are increasingly acting in a critical “boundary spanning” role that has important implications for both their own organization and that of their customers (Belasco, 1966; Lyonski & Johnson, 1983; Behrman & Perrault, 1984; Singh & Rhoads, 1991; Singh, 1998). A sales representative is often physically, socially, and psychologically separated from other types of organizational personal, within a job often lacking routine, where they are asked to play many roles within selling situations requiring persistence and motivation that are filled with interpersonal conflict, and often produce delayed results (Dubinsky, Howell, Ingram, & Bellenger, 1986). Indeed, salespeople often find themselves, as Mintzberg (1978) describes, as individuals caught in the middle between organizations. As Plouffe and Barclay (2007) suggest, there is much work to be done to understand if and how high-performing salespeople differ from the remainder of the sales force in their ability to better navigate, collect, and share information both intra- and inter-organizationally.

Since the essence of the sales representative’s job involves interaction with others in this boundary spanning role, salespeople can be expected to experience conflict and ambiguity regarding individual roles (Lyonski & Johnson, 1983). This is particularly salient in today’s complex business environment where salespeople are viewed as relationship builders and problem solvers for their clients (Lambert, 2008) while they are
conducting a variety of different tasks that include identifying prospects, gaining buy-in from the customer, creating solutions to customer needs, and closing deals (Üstüner & Godes, 2006). Singh and Rhoads (1991) have suggested a need to operationalize boundary role ambiguity. Attempts at developing constructs have been undertaken (e.g., Rizzo, House, & Litzman, 1970; Singh & Rhoads, 1991) and understanding the complex role of the sales professional remains an important line of study. The roles sales professional face is complex and changing. These roles will be important for researchers to examine, particularly from a communication perspective.

Need for Personal Selling Scholarship from a Communicative Perspective

Communication theory offers a largely untapped research tradition for examining personal selling interactions. Plouffe, Williams, and Wachner (2008) recently conducted a content analysis of 1,270 articles published from 1983-2006 in the 16 key journals acting as publication outlets for sales research. The analysis revealed a decline of published sales articles within prestigious marketing journals. The authors suggest one reason for this decline could be due to the overall lack of theoretical sophistication of sales research. Of the articles examined, 48.7% were deemed “atheoretical”, meaning the authors had not grounded models, hypotheses, or arguments in a clearly identifiable theoretical base. Communication-based theoretical foundations were not identified among the studies. However, related theoretical foundations of cognitive psychology (4.3%), social psychology (9%), and sociology (1.4%) were found to comprise a combined 14.7% of research over the time period. As Kuhn (1996) contends, developing working perspectives are necessary to provide the traction for advancing knowledge within a given discipline. Since philosophies in research are often handed down, scholars
in developing disciplines like personal selling must seek ways to adjust and adapt procedures, methods, and theoretical orientations to fit their field of inquiry (Bennett, 1979).

Although theories from the academic field of communication have typically not been utilized, scholars have highlighted the importance of communication in sales interactions. Since the sales representative is assigned many tasks related to his or her job within an organization, perhaps the most important for research is that of studying how the sales representative influences customer choice and decision making during the customer-sales representative dyad (Weitz, 1978). Personal selling is typically reliant on effective interpersonal relational behaviors (e.g., Guenzi, Pardo, Georges, 2007). The function of a salesperson, in attempts to gain a client, involves gathering information about the buyer, interpreting and understanding the buyer’s problems, and solving the solvable problems (Robinson, Faris, & Wind, 1967).

A sales representative’s interpersonal competencies have been identified as an important skill set for facilitating sales relationships and understanding organizational buyer-seller relationships. Spekman and Carraway (2006) state these interpersonal competencies include a sales representative’s abilities for speaking and listening well, relating to others in a one-on-one situation, even if the customer has different values or perspectives, and interacting appropriately in diverse situations. Liu and Comer (2007) found that there are definite factors management can harness to support the retrieval of critical sales information by their salespeople that include recruiting/hiring salespeople with good communication skills, providing training, and insuring support from upper management for information retrieval. Gathering important information from customers
is an important interpersonal competency for salespeople because it allows him or her to adjust persuasive messages about a product or service during interactions with a customer.

Asking questions to the customer has been advocated as a useful method for gathering information and understanding customer needs. Schuster and Dane (1986) found using questions were an important part of making a sale and customers respond to both product and relationship aspects of conversations. Schuster and Dane (1986) state asking questions aid the sales representative in task comments (e.g., discovering customers’ needs, answering objections) and socio-emotional comments (e.g., acknowledging the customer, releasing tension). To aid in tailoring a presentation, the sales representative should also ask appropriate questions to find relevant information and more effectively communicate and match product to customer needs (e.g., Rackham, 1988; Ziglar, 1991; Freese, 1999). Asking questions are important for adaptive selling because questions help the sales representative to diagnose the product/service needs of a customer, control the flow of conversations and the flexibility alter persuasive appeals and sales strategies to utilize with the customer (Shuster & Dane, 1986; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, Taylor, & Keillor, 2000).

Despite a continued acknowledgement of the importance of communication skills to salespeople, Sprowl and Senk (1986) noted communication research in personal sales is sparse. The literature review for the current study has found there are still meager amounts to research devoted to personal selling utilizing communication theory. Surprisingly, little research exists within the discipline relating to interpersonal sales relationships. Existing research privileging communication is often found outside
communication journals. Given the interpersonal nature of sales interactions and the importance selling plays for organizations, one would expect more emphasis on personal selling by communication scholars. Much of the existing sales literature within communication journals focuses primarily on the communication style of the sales representative and potential impacts communication has on buyer-seller relationships.

Bush and Grant (1994) offer further evidence that research privileging communication in relation to sales scholarship is both necessary and lacking. These scholars conducted a content analysis of the four major journals containing sales-related articles identified as Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management, and Industrial Marketing Management from the dates 1980-1992, to assess trends in sales force research. The authors report a small trend of borrowing from other disciplines such as communications developing in the literature. However, only 15 of the 358 articles examined in the study were identified as having foundations in communication (Bush & Grant, 1994). Williams, Spiro, and Fine (1990) were only able to identify seven studies that examined interpersonal communication between sales representative and customer involving elements other than message content.

While supportive empirical research is necessary to build upon Bush and Grant’s research, one would not surprised to find research with foundations in communication being pursued by scholars in various disciplines. However, there is no indication communication scholars are contributing in any significant way within communication-based journals. For example, Meredith (2007) found the Journal of Business Communication contained only two articles emphasizing sales in articles published
within the journal between years 1996-2006. Meredith’s finding is an important one considering Carmichael (1996) had previously referred to sales as a “distinctive and important aspect” of business communication in an article attempting to conceptualize the discipline of business communication.

Another reason selling may be absent from the literature is that scholars may wrongfully view selling as being tied too directly to marketing and other forms of business literature. This is a poor reason to neglect a vital function of organizations so intrinsically linked to communicative outcomes. Selling is inherently communication based. Other “business functions” like public relations have been embraced by communication scholars and as a result, public relations literature has flourished. Scholars are missing a chance to contribute to a rich literature that is being largely neglected in the communication field. The field of communication studies has the potential of adding theoretical roots to the historically practical and applied discipline of personal selling. Likewise, selling provides a valuable applied field for organizational researchers to bring into the fold of the communication discipline.

The interpersonal nature of sales interactions in particular should be a top priority for scholars interested in studying communication within organizational contexts. Sales force automation, relationship selling, outsourcing, sales management tasks, e-commerce, and internationalization of the sales force are all hot topics within organizations with real implications for the success or failure of the organization (Dubinsky, 2006). As Sprowl and Senk (1986) contend, examining communication in personal selling is a mutually beneficial line of inquiry for scholars and practitioners within organizational contexts because a) research in this area is sparse; b) personal sales forms the primary source of
income for most commercial organizations; c) many organizations invest substantial time
and money into training the sales force; d) better understandings of communicative
behaviors associated with sales can benefit students going into the workforce; and e) the
interpersonal sales dyads in sales interactions afford the researcher an opportunity to
examine interpersonal communication in organizational settings outside the traditional
superior/subordinate framework.

Organizational communication is perhaps the most obvious place to address
issues of selling under the discipline’s umbrella. However, organizational
communication has focused primarily on matters within the organization, itself, rather
than matters between the organization and other organizations and/or the external
environment. Organizational communication researchers predominately conduct research
within the organizational setting, or internal communication, versus looking beyond
organizational borders (Kreps, 1983; Cheney & Christensen, 2001). One exception is the
development of network theory that focuses largely on the technological aspects of
communication both within and outside corporations and other organizations (e.g.,
Monge & Contractor, 2001; Monge & Contractor, 2003). As discussed, personal selling
involves interpersonal communication in and between organizations, a line of research
not typically undertaken by organizational scholars. While exceptions exist, taking up the
call for examining inter-organizational communication in relation to selling has not been
undertaken to any real degree by organizational communication scholars.

Examining external communication efforts by organizations to outside
environments is an important, understudied aspect of organizational communication
studies and needs to include the interpersonal nature of personnel selling efforts. Cheney
(1983) emphasizes that much of the time and effort of organizations is devoted toward attempts to communicate persuasively with parties in the “environment” (frequently other organizations) through marketing, public relations, lobbying, testimony, image making, and issue advocacy. While it may be intended as a part of the marketing function, Cheney’s call does not specifically point to the vital importance of the sales relationship.

Understanding contexts in which interpersonal communication occurs is critical to understanding the nature of the organization, itself (Klauss & Bass, 1982). Since most organizations are so reliant on sales initiatives, the interpersonal sales relationships the sales forces engages in with customers is extremely important and has a number of implications for organizational success in regards to pulling in both intelligence about customer needs in the marketplace and monetary resources generated from sales. Every sales interaction is important to the organization because of the opportunity costs involved (Spiro & Perreault, 1979). Examining and understanding personal selling interactions is a vital lynchpin to the understanding of inter-organizational communication, external organizational communication, the co-creation of an organization’s identity between organizational stakeholders and the organization itself, and overall organizational success. Rigorous research is necessary to better allow companies to predict, explain, control, understand, and describe personal selling. Klauss and Bass (1982) state that progress toward understanding the nature and impact of communication within organizations is slow because communication is such a pervasive feature of organizations, researchers often find difficulty isolating separate phenomenon for investigation. However, as argued, individuals engaging in interpersonal
communication through personal selling clearly offer one important phenomenon for investigation that holds important implications for the organization.

The void of literature pertaining to personal selling is important to address as the examination of inter-organizational and external communication streams build momentum. Personal selling is arguably the most important communication of many businesses and involves an interesting interplay between organizational needs and individual interpersonal relationship building between sales representative and customer. As Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, and Ganesh (2004) explain, interpersonal relationships between sales representative and customer are “moments of truth” that can have a lasting impact on an organization and its goals.

As underscored earlier, research utilizing communication theory has contributed to the sales discipline but remains largely untapped in its potential (Capon, Holbrook, & Hulbert, 1977; Williams, Spiro, & Fine, 1990). From the marketing literature, Busch and Wilson (1977) utilized the work of French and Raven (1959) and Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953), research associated with interpersonal communication, to examine social power in the buyer-seller dyad. While few in number, there have been some promising studies come out of the communication discipline related to communication strategies employed during personal selling. This research on selling from within communication studies has focused largely on communication style and strategies employed by sales people. Appendix 1 contains a table containing a summary of several communication studies contributing to personal selling. It should be noted this table omits compliance-gaining research because this line of inquiry is related to the study at hand and is thus discussed separately in a subsequent section below.
Selling and sales management have clearly arrived at a critical juncture toward the advancement and shaping of theory and practice alike (Jones, Brown, Zoltners, and Weitz, 2005). Academics engaged in sales research have a real opportunity to contribute new ideas and the advancement of knowledge for organizations immersed in dynamic, competitive business environments (Dubinsky, 2006). Scholarly research targeting personal selling has been multi-disciplinary and has been published in business-related areas such as sales, marketing, and economics, as well as other areas such as psychology, sociology, and communication studies. While scholars have advanced personal selling as a communicative process, very little of the scholarship has utilized actual communication theory.

Individual Sales Success in Personal Selling

A substantial number of investigations from sales and marketing have focused on the effect of the sales representative’s characteristics on sales representative performance. Early traditional research into sales success was viewed as a function of the sales representative’s job satisfaction, motivation, ability, role clarity, and other attributes particular to the sales representative’s biographical or psychological profile (Riordan, Oliver, & Donnelly, 1977). The most frequently studied theme pertaining to personal selling is the examination of the selling processes and techniques of salespeople (Williams & Plouffe, 2006). Selling process and technique studies examine individual-level approaches to improving the effectiveness of customer and prospect interactions and sales outcomes, respectively. This line of research is typically at an individual level of analysis where the customer-seller dyad is examined.
Understanding how and why some individuals are more effective in sales interactions than others has obvious value to theorists, practitioners, and managers involved in personal selling. Research examining and explaining the effectiveness of personal selling has since found mixed results and published research in peer reviewed journals examining personal selling success has been broken up into a range of topics. Sales research has investigated variables relating to sales success that include influence strategies, personality traits / behavioral dispositions, and sales representative resources and capabilities. Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1977) identified a sales representative’s performance as being a function of his or her a) level of motivation, b) sales aptitude, and c) perception of how his or her role should be performed. However, as Weitz (1981) notes, much research in selling has remained inconsistent and at times has yielded contradictory results, even for variables that can be assessed with high reliability such as age, education, and sales experience.

In a study summarizing the quantitative findings in sales research at the individual level of analysis, Churchill, Ford, Hartley, and Walker (1985) conducted a meta-analysis that examined the relationship between sales representative performance and sales representative aptitudes (e.g., mental abilities, personality), selling skills (e.g., sales presentations), personal characteristics (e.g., physical traits, experience), motivation, and organizational/environmental roles. These scholars found each of these factors accounted for an average of only 4% of the variance in performance. Subsequent meta-analyses have also found disappointingly low variances in predicting sales representative performance, in the 10-20% range (Vinchur, Schippmann, Switzer, & Roth, 1998; Rich, Bommer, McKenzie, Podsakoff, & Johnson, 1999).
There are a number of possible reasons why the results examining the variance in sales performance research have been important yet lackluster. The categories used by Churchill, Ford, Hartley, and Walker (1985) are inclusive of a range of different types of research. For example, the results of “aptitude” research cover a wide array of research. While mental abilities and personality research may be similar and mixing results into a catch-all category is helpful for examining overall variance, it may not, however, be reflective of results to the individual, exclusive lines of research.

The failure of previous research to account for differences in sales jobs by activity or industry may explain the minimal variation attributable to specific performance determinants (Churchill, et al., 1985). Moncrief (1986) noted the failure of early sales research to address the differences in industry specific job activities and advocated for controlling for differences in career stages, as well as sales activities/jobs performed by salespeople in different firms and industries. More recent research focuses on more narrowly defining selling situations within specific industries or companies (e.g., Sager & Ferris, 1986; Weilbaker, 1990). This is an important observation because researchers must acknowledge the nature of selling is becoming increasingly complex, has changed dramatically in the past decade, and the relationship between the sales representative and customer has changed, especially due to customer expectations of salespeople to be more knowledgeable, respond faster, and provide solutions to their problems (Cron, Marshall, Singh, Spiro, & Sujan, 2005). Research uncovering significant findings, even if the amount of variation is small, should be considered helpful in shaping the overall picture of the selling process as many other variable factors contribute to influencing a sale.
(Williams & Spiro, 1985). Hence, any contributions helping to map and better illustrate the selling process are of great value to the discipline.

Many researchers have turned to utilizing sales models to help explain the sales process and many relate to the cognitive processes of salespeople and are communication-oriented. A number of models dot the sales force landscape. While not comprehensive of all applicable models, several models influential toward shaping past and current sales research and which also clearly illustrate the importance of cognition and interpersonal communication can be found in Appendices 2 and 3. The models in Appendix 2 are comprised of sales process models and Appendix 3 contains “othering” or customer interpretation models.

A sales representative’s ability to adapt within a selling situation is one of the most frequently studied topics pertaining to influence techniques used in personal selling and was first noted in the sales and sales management literature primarily during the 1980s (Fine, 2007). Sales theorists have suggested that successful salespeople are able to evaluate and adjust their sales approaches to fit perceptions of customers and such adjustments improve performance. Hence, adaptive selling has been considered an important area of research for sales scholars.

**Adaptive Selling and Customer Orientation**

One of the most popular streams of personal selling research in the sales and marketing literature has been adaptive selling. The practice of adaptive selling is defined as the “altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation” (Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986, p. 175). Adaptive selling is thus rooted in cognitions as a sales representative must gather
and process information and react, accordingly during interactions with a customer. Research has shown salespeople use different sales approaches in different situations. Early research contributing to the notion of adaptive selling was conducted by Wise (1974) who notes the need for sales representatives to judge prospects quickly using stereotypes and rules of thumb to determine what type of sales approach to employ. Wise’s research found customers that were dressed well when visiting new car salespeople were treated “better” than those who were poorly dressed.

Spearheaded by Weitz, sales and marketing scholars are responsible for a great deal of research examining relationships between sales representative behavior and customer decision making in regards to adaptive selling. Weitz (1978) queried salespeople from a large industrial manufacturer and found a significant relationship between performance and strategy formulation abilities. This scholar contends that a sales representative’s impression of the customer is based on an evaluation of: choice space or the customer’s decision process for making choices; choice rule or how a customer combines information in the choice space to reach a decision; and modifiability, the degree to which a sales representative believes he or she can influence or change the customer’s choice space and/or choice rules. A significant relationship was found between cognitive abilities and performance is related to the representative’s ability to correctly analyze the impressions of the customer.

In related research, Spiro and Perreault (1979) examined the combinations of influence strategies used by salespeople during a sales call based on five different influence strategies that included legitimate, expert, referent, integration, and impression management. The researchers also sought to evaluate the impact of antecedent situation
characteristics on the sales representative’s choice of influence. For example, they postulated that expectations and influence attempts would be different if the sales representative was dealing with a regular customer versus a new customer. The results indicate that selling situation impacted the sales representative’s choice of influence strategy mix and different patterns of influence use were identified. Salespeople dealing with customers who were more involved in the sales call where the purchase was more important to the customer, the greater the sales representative’s use of influence strategy. Hence, the study effectively showed a relationship between influence tactics used by the sales representative and the sales situation.

Weitz’s (1981) contingency framework, illustrated in Appendix 2, proposes that effective selling is a series of sales representative behaviors contingent upon the resources of the sales representative, the characteristics of the buyer-seller relationship, and the nature of the customer’s buying task. Weitz’s framework assumes there is no one sales situation or one way to sell. Different approaches and sales representative characteristics are needed to sell to new business versus established business and customers have varying personalities and differing communication styles. An important construct of the framework notes that adapting to the customer by engaging in a unique behavior pattern tailored to each customer is assumed to be related to effectiveness.

Saxe and Weitz (1982) proposed the Selling Orientation-Customer Orientation (SOCO) scale to measure the degree to which representatives engage in customer-orientated selling. The authors note that salespeople can realize long-term benefit from using customer-oriented selling but also incur costs such as a loss in short-term sales due to longer selling cycles. Thus, customer-orientation makes sense when benefits outweigh
the costs and are likely when: a) the sales representative can offer a range of alternatives and has the expertise to determine which alternatives will satisfy customer needs; b) the sales representative’s customers are typically engaged in complex buying tasks; c) the sales representative typically has a cooperative relationship with his or her customers; d) repeat sales and referrals are an important source of business for the sales representative.

The 24-item instrument was created to measure the customer orientation in salespeople across various industries. Customer satisfaction and salespeople’s level of empathy have been found to be positively related to customer orientation while sales volume incentives and job tenure have been found to be negatively related to customer orientation (Widmier, 2002).

Related, communication style and adaptability has been shown to be related to sales success. One example is that by Williams and Spiro (1985) who conducted an exploratory study of sales representative’s communication perspective using modified versions of Bass’ Communication Style Inventory (1967), consisting of the sales representative’s styles being task oriented, interaction oriented, or self oriented. Data for the study was collected from customers and sales representatives of 13 participating sporting goods stores in a major city in the Southeast. The results of the study found that communication styles measured by task, self, and interaction orientation were significantly related in explaining sales variance and successful salespeople were found to be those who recognized different customer communication styles and appropriately adapted to those styles. These findings help lend credibility to Weitz’s (1978) claim that the sales representative’s perception of the customer will be related to his or her ability to influence that customer’s decision.
Building upon this scholarship, Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan (1986) proposed the adaptive selling framework (Figure 1). The framework is not intended to describe a process but rather identify key constructs that include sales variables, sales representative characteristics, and the behavior of sales representatives. Included are 21 propositions related to effective selling that include the influence of a sales representative’s knowledge of customer types and sales strategies, the sales representative’s motivation to alter behavior, and the sales representative’s ability to practice adaptive selling. Important to the model, the cognitive aspects of the sales representative are related to his/or her skills in correctly categorizing customers and sales situations. The authors refer to these cognitive aspects as knowledge and memory structures. In sum, the capabilities needed to practice adaptive selling effectively include a) an elaborate knowledge structure of sales situations that allow salespeople to recognize sales situations and retrieve from memory an appropriate sales approach and b) an ability to collect information to facilitate the process of matching sales situations to categories in memory. Additionally Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan’s (1986) framework for adaptive selling implies that adaptive selling behavior increases with experience. This contention was supported by a meta-analysis conducted by Franke and Park (2006).
Sujan, Weitz, and Sujan (1988) advocate improving sales productivity by having sales people work “smarter” not “harder.” The authors contend better sales people are more effective sellers due to being better at adaptive selling. In turn, adaptive selling is enhanced by knowledge and motivation. Sujan, Weitz, and Sujan (1988) propose ten ways to increase sales representative productivity by making them “smarter” that include: 1) utilization of scenarios in training; 2) how to better categorize customers based on “underlying” attributes such as personalities or behavioral styles rather than “superficial” attributes such as sex and age; 3) provide salespeople with market research; 4) integration of company information (e.g., products, presentation techniques, polices) based on customer classifications; 5) using expert salespeople in training; 6) making the job fun by...
attending to both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards; being careful that compensation isn’t rewarding the wrong type of behaviors from the sales force (e.g., rewarding only consequences of work not content); 7) providing feedback; 8) encouraging salespeople to analyze success and failures; 9) helping salespeople to manage themselves; and 10) building a sense of mutual commitment.

In an attempt to measure the degree to which salespeople are successful in the practice of adaptive selling, Spiro and Weitz (1990) developed a 16-item scale, referred to as the ADAPTS scale. The scale measures five facets of adaptive selling that include: a) recognition that different sales approaches are needed for different customers; b) confidence in the ability to use a variety of approaches; c) confidence in the ability to alter approach during interaction; d) collection of information to facilitate adoption; e) actual use of different approaches. Included in the development of Spiro and Weitz’s (1990) adaptive selling scale was the consideration of several personality traits necessary for adaptive selling. These general personality traits include: a) self-monitoring (individuals have a consistent pattern in terms of the degree they alter their self presentation in response to situational cues); b) empathy (the reaction of individuals to the observed experiences of other individuals); c) androgyny (degree to which individuals feel they are characterized by traits culturally associated with both men and women); d) being an opener (an ability to make others elicit information about themselves); and e) intrinsic reward orientation (a perception of what causes a favorable outcome whereby external locus attributes success or failure to things beyond the individual such as luck, chance, or fate and internal locus attributes success to one’s own behavior).
The development of the ADAPTS scale by Spiro and Weitz marks an important point in shaping the conceptualization and operationalization of adaptive selling. However, the use of the ADAPTS scale and its relation to sales performance has generated skepticism due to mixed results (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, Taylor, & Keillor, 2000). Marks, Vorhies, and Badovick (1996) offered an alternative 11 item, 2-factor model, which was comprised of both beliefs and behaviors. Another scale, the ADAPTS-SV, was developed as a shortened version after a confirmatory factor analysis conducted by Robinson, Marshall, Moncrief, and Lassk (2002). The ADAPTS-SV uses five items to represent the four facets originally proposed in the original ADAPTS scale. Research utilizing factor analysis conducted by Chakrabarty, Brown, Widing, and Taylor (2004) identifies the ADAPTS-SV as a preferable measure of multifaceted adaptive selling as compared to existent, competing models because ADAPTS-SV provides the best representation of adaptive selling as originally conceptualized by Spiro and Weitz (1990).

A meta-analysis focusing on adaptive selling behavior and customer orientation research conducted by Franke and Park (2006) combined the findings from 155 studies and found that adaptive selling behavior and selling experience have greater effects than customer orientation or gender on sales representative performance. Adaptive selling behavior was found to increase sales performance among all three measures of performance in the study – self-rated, manager-rated, and objective performance but is related more to self-rated performance. As with prior investigations, the predictors did not account for large amounts of variance in sales representative performance.

However, research conducted by Giacobbe, Jackson, Crosby, and Bridges (2006) concluded the greatest advantage from engaging in adaptive selling behavior can be
achieved when: a) needs variability is high; b) the buying unit and offerings are complex, and c) each customer/prospect affords significant long-term profit potential. The authors propose a path model where adaptive selling behavior was found positively associated with the performance of salespeople. While more research is necessary, the results are promising considering adaptive selling behavior explained about one-third of the variation in sales performance.

Other advances into the study and importance of adaptive selling are being made. Adaptive selling has been described as critical to organizational success due to its positive effect on the attitudes and behaviors of the sales force in relation to job satisfaction and performance (Park & Holloway, 2003; Fang, Palmatier, & Evans, 2004). Recent research into adaptive selling shows sales representative initiative plays a moderating role between intrinsic motivation and adaptive selling (Jaramillo, Locander, Spector, & Harris, 2007).

Perhaps the primary draw of adaptive selling is that it logically makes sense. The adaptive selling framework developed by Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan’s (1986) and the personality traits advocated by Spiro and Weitz (1990) seem to align with an ability to tailor and alter a pitch by salespeople. After all, what scholars and practitioners are searching for are those qualities that some individual salespeople possess that make them more persuasive, and thus, more successful in sales interactions with customers. The adaptive selling research proposes that salespeople have an opportunity to gather information, process that information, and adjust to the customer based on the sales representative’s skills and capabilities during a sales interaction. This requires communicative activities that include probing for information, asking questions,
listening, and detecting verbal and nonverbal cues yet empirical relationships between such cues and selling effectiveness is meager (Morgan & Stoltman, 1990). However, a related research stream is being investigated by sales and marketing scholars exploring the antecedent skills and capabilities of salespeople through an analysis of social cognitions (Porter & Inks, 2000).

Social Cognition and the Cognitive Selling Paradigm

The relationship between the accuracy of social perception and social behavior has been a popular topic for social psychology and has been pursued for offering insights into the characteristics of the sales representative and/or the sales representative-customer dyad (Weitz, 1978). Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1977) proposed that a sales representative’s performance is based on his or her motivation, his or her sales aptitude, and his or her perception of how his or her role should be performed. Despite the results of the Churchill et al. (1985) study indicating aptitude was not a strong predictor of sales performance, research into sales cognition, which could be considered a type of sales representative’s aptitude, has experienced promising results. In fact, Marshall and Michaels (2001) assert examining cognitive structures as being among the most promising conceptual foundations for the future of selling and sales management research.

The basis of the study of social cognition is that individuals have general knowledge about themselves and others that provide expectations that enables us to function in the world that pertains to person, situation, behavior, and motivation (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; 2007). Cognition has been described as referring to everything taking place in our brains that help us understand the world that include such mental activities as
alertness, concentration, memory, reasoning, creativity, and emotional experience (Restak, 2003). In any communication interaction, each participant “sizes up” or makes assessments about the person with which he or she is interacting with. Hence, social cognition examines how individuals process information during social interactions.

Similarly, as stated by Webster (1968), a sales representative perceives or “sizes up” a customer through cognitive processes that are based on role expectations of the other person and corresponding perceived sets of opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. In turn, a sales representative’s behavior in a sales interaction is determinant on his or her knowledge, training, personality, and previous experience and hence, ability to “play the role” of a sales representative (Webster, 1968). Formulating communication strategies is illustrated essentially as a cognitive process, where the objective of the communication strategy, method for implementing the strategy, and specific messages are developed by the sales representative prior to the sales interaction. Here, upon forming a strategy, the sales representative transmits the message to the customer. At this point, the sales representative evaluates the effectiveness of the interaction based on customer reactions and the sales representative can modify his or her impression of the customer, change a strategic objective change the method for achieving the objective, or continue with the same strategy.

Research demonstrates that customers form attitudes about salespeople based, in part, on whether the sales representative uses a “weaker” or “soft” presentation style more oriented toward relationship building as compared to the “traditional hard sell” presentation that views a sales interaction as an engagement where there is a “winner” or “loser” and is often associated with negative sales representative stereotypes (Jolson,
Further, Campbell and Kirmani (2000) found a sales representative’s messages may affect consumers’ cognitions about a sales representative’s motives. Investigators have advocated turning to social psychological based theories as possible avenues for explaining variance in sales performance such as social intelligence (Sujan, 1999), social exchange theory, and social cognitive theory (Plouffe & Barclay, 2007). Organizational research has investigated various competencies and abilities persons possess and apply based upon situational environment (Pervin, 1989).

Insights from social cognition research as applied to adaptive selling has focused largely on examining knowledge structures. These studies assume that knowledge structures reflect differences in the abilities of salespeople to collect and comprehend crucial information based on the current situation relative to his/her recollection of past selling attempts and adapting based upon actions thought most like to result in a sale (Morgan & Stoltman, 1990). This line of inquiry has been referred to as the “cognitive selling paradigm” by sales and marketing researchers.

The “cognitive selling paradigm” refers to research focusing on linking selling behaviors to underlying knowledge structures that vary from individual to individual (e.g., Leigh & Rethans, 1984; Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986; Leong, Busch, & John, 1989; Leigh & McGraw, 1989; Szymanski & Churchill, 1990; Macintosh, Anglin, Szymanski, & Gentry, 1992; Porter & Inks, 2000). Under this paradigm, salespeople are understood to function in complex environments that necessitate the processing of a lot of information. Researchers using this paradigm view salespeople as using information from memory about client categories and selling scripts to help them identify the product
and sales process needs of clients (Szymanski & Churchill, 1990). In turn, salespeople rely on categories contained in the long-term memory associated with knowledge for identifying a customers’ product and selling needs (Szymanski, 1988). It is not surprising that these key characteristics are linked as characteristics of effective salespeople. More effective salespeople have been found to have richer and more interrelated knowledge structures in terms of different categories of customers, customer traits, and more sales strategies that could be used with different customer types than less effective sellers (e.g., Sujan, Sujan, & Bettman, 1988; Gengler, Howard, & Zolner, 1995). A sales representative’s knowledge structure has been described as consisting of a declarative component, or the stored situational cues and facts and a procedural component, or selling routines, actions, strategies, or heuristics that apply to different selling situations (e.g., Leigh & Rethans, 1984; Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986; Porter & Inks, 2000).

Leigh and Rethans (1984) apply cognitive script theory, suggesting that buyers and sellers learn stereotypic sequences, or cognitive scripts, for buying and selling occasions. In a two-phased study, the researchers sought to generate a script of norms or group scripts and evoking context for which the script might be presented in the first phase and validation of the script in the second phase. In phase one, 36 purchasing managers were asked to give a list of common activities, events, actions, or behaviors relevant to four scenarios provided and put them in the order in which the activities, events, actions, or behaviors would occur. Individual scripts were edited and tabulated based on frequency of specific activities and events and an overall script of the purchase process was designed. In phase two, the script was cross-validated, checking for
commonness of actions and sequence with a mail questionnaire generating 109 respondents who classified themselves as purchasing manager/director, buyer, or purchasing manager, respectively. The results displayed the presence of cognitive scripts within the domain of industrial marketing and purchasing. Script validation strongly suggested the scripts developed using free elicitation were a valid representation of the purchase process examined. Thus, results support the existence of individual and group scripts that capture common knowledge structures while displaying the utility of using an inductive, inferential process for helping to develop sales theory.

Using script-theoretic analysis, Leong, Busch, and John (1989) examined sales representative knowledge bases in terms of effectiveness in customer interactions. Life insurance agents comprised the sample of 80 participants. Production records from the most recent period were used for effectiveness and those participants selling at least a half standard deviation above the sample average were categorized as highly effective and the other half were considered the low effective condition. The authors state the half standard deviation criterion were used because of ease of operationalization, objectivity, and more severe cutoffs would have reduced the sample size drastically and may have exaggerated the types and differences most commonly found between high and low performing salespeople. A second criterion was applied to classify agents into high and low effectiveness for each insurance line. Personal interviews were conducted using a modified version of the role decomposition approach (Leigh & Rethans, 1983), transcribed, and then coded for response categories for classification of actions and events for each situation and elaborateness of response. The results indicate highly
effective salespeople provided more elaborate, distinctive, contingent, and hypothetical scripts than low effective salespeople for practicing selling.

In research similar to Leigh and Rethans (1984), Leigh and McGraw (1989) mapped the procedural knowledge of experienced, effective industrial salespeople in a two-phased (free elicitation and validation) study of sales calls. Sales call scripts for objectives, planning, and customer interaction were generated, examined, and validated. Procedural knowledge of industrial salespeople was modeled systematically and reliably using script methods. Commonalities in scripts across six contexts were found to be high. The most frequent objectives in initial sales calls were found, in order, to be: gather information about buyer needs; develop rapport; create a favorable image as a sales representative; communicate a positive impression of the company; determine key decision makers; assess sales potential; assess buyer’s attitude about the company; lay groundwork for follow-up; and set an appointment for follow-up.

Szymanski and Churchill (1990) compared differences in the declarative knowledge of successful and unsuccessful salespeople in regard to evaluating prospects within the financial services industry. In-depth interviews were conducted by a free elicitation procedure to discover evaluation cues salespeople have in memory for identifying and evaluating prospective customers. Responses were coded from fifty-four participants. Results indicate that successful and unsuccessful salespeople have similar numbers of cues available for describing and qualifying prospects. However, the findings suggest differences exist in the way more effective salespeople assign weight to certain cues and the types of cues a prospect must have to be classified as a poor, moderate, or
good prospect. The study indicates more effective salespeople have different cognitive structures at the prospecting stage available for performing selling tasks.

In a similar vein, Macintosh, Anglin, Szymanski, and Gentry (1992) contribute to the cognitive selling paradigm by exploring how trust and relationship-building are related to sales representative effectiveness. These authors reviewed the results of two studies (Anglin, 1990; Szymanski, 1987) that investigated knowledge, relationship development and sales performance. Findings from these studies indicate higher performing salespeople place greater emphasis in establishing trust with customers and prefer to find out information about the prospect before reciprocating with information about themselves. In contrast, lower performers show a preference to disclose information about themselves before obtaining personal information about the prospect.

In a study particularly salient to this dissertation, Porter and Inks (2000) examine a sales representative’s practice of adaptive selling and his or her attributional complexity. Spiro and Weitz’s (1990) ADAPTS scale, described earlier, was utilized to measure adaptive selling. Fletcher, Danilovics, Pernandez, Patterson, and Reeder (1986) ACS scale was used to measure attributional complexity. ACS is used to measure individual differences whereby some people possess more complex attributional schemata that can be used to determine or the explain causality of events in their social environment. A total of 161 industrial sales representatives completed a self-report questionnaire. The research findings indicate that an individual with an elaborate/cognitive complex knowledge structure will have a predisposition to practice adaptive selling. In other words, a sales representative is more likely to practice adaptive selling when they are more cognitively complex.
Matsuo and Kusumi (2002) contributed to the literature focusing upon a cognitive approach with an investigation into the moderating effect of sales experience on the relationship between Japanese sales representatives’ procedural knowledge and performance. Using salespeople from three Japanese car dealers, two questionnaires were administered with a total of 171 respondents. Analysis showed that the more experienced salespeople become, the stronger the relationship between procedural knowledge and performance. The results suggest high-performing salespeople have customer-oriented knowledge and active selling knowledge. Additionally, some support was found that sales experience moderates the relationship between procedure knowledge and performance.

Shepard, Gardinal, Johnson, and Rentz (2006) examined cognitive differences of highly skilled or expert salespeople from a sample of 105 participants. The researchers compared differences in the decision processes of expert and less-skilled salespeople in the food service industry as they progressed through decision points of a difficult sales situation scenario. Independent judges found experts made better decisions faster and in a more confident manner, were more likely to utilize their memory of past sales interactions for resolving current problems, and employed different strategies. The authors note these findings lend support to previous research in the cognitive selling paradigm by showing expert salespeople apply superior declarative and procedural knowledge in the selling process.

Recently, Sharma, Levy, and Evanschitzky (2007) explored how much variance in knowledge structure variables explain sales performance and offer the knowledge structure model illustrated in Figure 2. Using a self-elicitation questionnaire, 225 retail
salespeople with a minimum of one year’s experience at a division of a U.S. department store were asked to describe the types/kinds of customers that come to their departments, the characteristics of the customer categories that most and least frequently visited the department, and the sales strategy they used for each. Objective measures for knowledge structure constructs and responses were matched and coded with employee sales performance data. Strong relationships between the elements of knowledge structures and sales representative performance were found. The model explained 50.2 percent of the variance in sales representative’s performance, which is significantly higher than previous research.

While additional research is called for by the authors, 50.2 percent is an exciting finding in comparison to previous sales performance variances reported by Churchill, Ford, and Hartley (1985), whereby sales representative aptitude accounted for 2 percent in sales variance, selling skills for 7.2 percent, personal characteristics for 3 percent, motivation for 4 percent, and role for 9 percent of variance, respectively. The results also found the impact of knowledge structures on performance was significantly higher for men than women, meaning men inherently have less-developed knowledge structures than women. According to the researchers, this would suggest that women have better developed social knowledge structures that are particularly relevant for personal selling than do men.
While a substantial portion of the cognitive-related research into personal selling focused on knowledge structures, other promising research is emerging which studies other cognitive affective influences. Using insights from the cognitive approach, Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000), examine the role of memory processes with regard to emotional behavior and making a sale. The authors offer a conceptualization for examining sales call anxiety by suggesting it is closely related to social anxiety. Verbeke and Bagozzi
state sales call anxiety is a prevalent response to selling situations and reaches intense levels for many salespeople at some point in their careers. Drawing from the social anxiety literature, four dimensions of sales call anxiety are proposed and tested: 1) negative self-evaluation based on an insecurity in ability to convey a positive image to customers; 2) imagined negative evaluations from customers; 3) physiological symptoms linked to overestimating how negatively others evaluate them in interpersonal exchanges (e.g., shaky voice, blushing); and 4) performance of “safety-seeking behaviors” or coping responses that are involuntary (e.g., avoiding eye contact, speaking quickly, and not self-disclosing). A questionnaire of 189 Dutch Bank mortgage salespeople found these dimensions are functions of negative affectivity and anxiety-provoking contextual cues and negatively influence performance during the canvassing and closing stages of selling.

Related studies following-up the Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000) continue to examine the consequences of emotions in selling situations. Verbeke and Bagozzi (2002) find that experiencing shame and embarrassment in personal selling leads to protective reactions that have a negative impact on selling efforts within an organizational boundary-spanning context. Experiencing self- and customer-provoked embarrassment in a customer interaction has been found to diminish adaptive resource utilization of salespeople and promote an avoidance of the customers in the future (Verbeke & Bagozzi, 2003). In a cross-cultural study between Dutch and Philipino salespeople, both cultures experienced similar feelings of shame as a result of customer actions but opposite results in sales performance occurred whereby Philipino salespeople fostered enhanced customer relationship building while the sales volume, communication effectiveness, and relationship building decreased for Dutch sales personnel (Bagozzi,
Verbeke, & Gavino, 2003). Sales perseverance and task concentration were found to best help salespeople as coping strategies when faced with anxiety in a sales situation (Belschak, Verbeke, & Bagozzi, 2006). This line of research effectively points to the effects cognitive processes can have on salespeople’s communication abilities in relation to sales success with practical solution recommendations for practice.

Personality traits and the effect of psychological variables on sales success is also being examined by sales and marketing scholars. Sujan (1999) found three elements of street smarts (i.e., adapting to the environment, selecting to be in a more appropriate environment, and shaping or molding the environment) all contribute significantly to performance and sales representative satisfaction. Meta-analysis shows in applications of the Big Five personality tests that conscientiousness has the highest correlation with sales performance at .31 (Vinchur, Schippmann, Switzer, & Roth, 1998). Optimistic insurance salespeople have been found to sell 20 to 40 percent more than pessimists (Schulman, 1999) and new and used car salespeople with fun-loving attitudes have a positive effect on adaptive selling and job satisfaction (Maxwell, Reed, Saker, & Story, 2005). Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka’s (2007) research surveying 956 sales representatives suggests that sales representatives displaying higher levels of need for cognition, greater sensitivity to the expressive behavior of others, and greater ability to modify self-presentation were related to higher levels of self-related sales performance. Here, need for cognition is defined as a tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive activity. Similarly, Sojka and Deeter-Schmelz (2008) recently found need for cognition and affective orientation both correlated with self-rated sales performance and need for cognition correlated with objective sales performance measures used in the study.
Role expectations have also been examined as related to sales performance. For example, Swan and Futrell (1978) suggest sales supervisors should clarify job accomplishments, result expectations, and priorities to increase the job satisfaction and feelings of job security of sales people. Bartkus, Peterson, and Bellenger (1989) found Type A behavioral patterns have a significant positive effect on both effort and role clarity of sales people. Both work effort and role clarity in turn have a significant positive effect on sales performance and experience has a significant positive effect on role clarity and on performance but does not significantly relate to work effort. In a study consisting of 167 sales participants at a medical supplies distributor, learning goal-orientation, or a desire to develop skills, was found to have a significant relationship to sales performance while a performance orientation was not significantly related to performance (VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1999). Miao and Evans (2007) found from a cross-sectional survey of 175 salespeople that the cognitive and affective dimensions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation provide a better description of the sales representative motivation-role perceptions-performance relationship than do global motivation constructs. Role overload, where individuals are overtaxed cognitively due to conditions like time pressures, too many responsibilities, and/or high expectations, has been found to have a negative effect on job satisfaction and have a significant impact on organizational commitment based on a 343 respondents of a mailed survey to sales and marketing executives (Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan, & Roberts, 2007).

Researchers have begun to consider cognitive-related communicative elements of the sales representative as linked to sales success. Goolsby, Lagace, and Boorom (1992) found support that adaptive psychological traits are related to sales performance. Sales
personnel high in self-monitoring, androgyny, and intrinsic orientation were found to be more likely to excel across all sales performance dimensions based on 177 respondents. Impacts of these traits were found to vary somewhat depending upon gender (e.g., androgyny was consistently a stronger predictor of performance in women than in men). Communication effectiveness is offered as mediating the relationship between psychological adaptiveness and performance.

Similarly, Sharma (1999) found support that if customers perceive salespeople to have a positive affect toward them, message processing and persuasion are enhanced but when the sales representative has a negative effect, lower levels of persuasion and heuristic processing occur. Sengupta, Krapfel, and Pursateri (2000) examined key account salespeople in a study with 176 key, front-line sales representatives and found individual abilities affect relationship processes which, in turn, determine relationship outcomes. Intermediate communication was found to be critical to translating salespeople’s strategic ability into effective performance. Reid, Pullins, and Plank (2002) found differences in sales representative’s communication behaviors in regards to the persuasiveness of getting, giving, and using information depending on the purchase situation based on a questionnaire completed by 518 purchasing agents. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) propose consumer identification is important in consumer-company relationships and thus, marketers must communicate clearly in a way that is going to increase identification.

In addition to studying knowledge structures and a sales representative’s motivation, Morgan and Stoltman (1990) suggest researchers need to examine the skills and abilities that underlie adaptive selling and sales success. Sales research would
benefit from using new theoretical perspectives and employing new methods to continue the advancement of the discipline (Marshall & Michaels, 2001; Leigh & Tanner, 2004; Williams & Plouffe, 2007). The Goolsby, Lagace, and Boorom (1992) suggest that communication effectiveness may mediate the relationship between psychological adaptiveness and performance and call for research into this area. Considering communication has been referred to as the “essence” of the buyer-seller relationship (Williams, Spiro, & Fine, 1990), more research utilizing communication theory must be explored.

**Compliance-Gaining**

Perhaps one area that can be considered a true stream of research that has been undertaken by communication scholars relating to sales success is the utilization of compliance-gaining strategies. Compliance-gaining research falls under the category of interpersonal influence within interpersonal communication studies. Compliance-gaining research describes message behavior that intended to produce behavior change and therefore can be more accurately described as compliance-gaining strategies (Dillard, Anderson, & Knobloch, 2002). In other words, the compliance-gaining approach suggests that an individual’s message acts as an influence for garnering a desired behavior. Considering what Spiro and Perreault refer to as the “widely accepted premise that personal selling is an interpersonal influence process” (p. 452), the research stream examining personal selling from a compliance-gaining perspective makes sense. Research into selling from communication studies to this point has been almost exclusively examined from a compliance-gaining perspective.
Sprowl and Senk (1986) examined the relationship between the utilization of compliance-gaining strategy choices and high, medium, and low sales success. Agents in the auto sales industry were chosen as respondents so that variations in strategy-use between industries and a consistent measure of sales volume between sales agents could be identified. Results indicate that salespeople who made greater use of taking a positive approach with compliance-gaining strategies relating to liking himself, positive expertise of the product, and a positive approach coincides with higher sales.

Sprowl (1986) examined gender differences in compliance-gaining strategy use with salespeople in insurance and real estate agencies. Male sales agents were found to utilize a wider range of compliance strategies than female sales agents. The results are tempered by the researcher who notes the insurance and real estate industries are not high compliance strategy users indicating that verbal aggression of either gender might violate customer expectations. Thus, females in other industries might be more verbally aggressive. Customer gender appeared to have little effect upon sales agent strategy but there was insufficient power in the study that might have been the reason for a lack of significant results.

Parrish-Sprowl, Carveth, and Senk (1994) investigated the relationship between using compliance-gaining strategies, communicator image, and sales representative success. The study uses real estate sales agents as a study group and found no statistically significant relationships between using compliance-gaining strategies and sales success. The findings indicate that compliance strategies are not effective for predicting sales success, at least in real estate. However, the findings did indicate a link between sales success and communicator image. Thus, this study suggests a positive image of the seller
plays a role in the successful sale. While not studied here, one might suspect that compliance-gaining strategies might be less effective in relationship-type sales encounters versus selling in a retail environment and should be confirmed with systematic research.

Research of the last five years points to the effectiveness of compliance strategies in sales situations requiring less commitment from a buyer. Research on personal selling using variations of interpersonal influence techniques whereby the seller uses working requests has been found to increase compliance from targets. Influence techniques being examined in different contexts include foot-in-the-door, door-in-the-face, and lowballing (e.g., Kirmani & Campbell, 2004; Kardes, Fennis, Hirt, Tormala, & Bullington, 2007).

Fennis, Das, and Pruyn (2006) examined interpersonal communication compliance using disrupt-then-reframe (DTR) techniques in sales scripts. Sales scripts are more common in selling situations, such as telemarketing, where sales personnel use “stock” lines or scripts for interaction. An example of the disrupt-then-reframe technique is “a set of cards costs 200 pennies, that’s $2. It’s a bargain” involves confusing the customer (200 pennies) and then reducing ambiguity with reframing ($2. It’s a bargain). These authors argue that the technique was generalizable across interpersonal influence situations based on previous research (e.g., Davis & Knowles, 1999) and two field experiments. The DTR technique was found to be 1.5 times more effective than a regular sales script in inducing monetary requests for various types of products for noncommercial and commercial purposes. Kardes, Fennis, Hirt, Tormala, and Bullington (2007) supported these results in other retail settings and a non-sales influence situation.
These authors conclude this technique is effective because it produces a distraction and then reduces the ability to generate counterarguments.

Interpersonal research relating to compliance peaked through the 1980s and 1990s and has since ebbed. This is at least partially due to a scholarly disagreement as to the best way to study compliance. Compliance-gaining researchers (e.g., Miller, Boster, Roloff, & Seibold, 1977; Seibold, 1988) contend compliance is best studied by using closed-ended scales to indicate the likelihood participants would use a particular strategy. This differs from the constructivist orientation (e.g., Clark & Delia, 1977), which proposed an examination of compliance by assessing the individual’s cognitive abilities (often using Crockett’s Role Category Questionnaire), allowing participants create their own message in response to hypothetical scenarios, and then coding their responses. Burleson et al. (1988) argue a message construction procedure is favorable to strategy selection procedures, as utilized in compliance-gaining, because construction procedures: a) model what people do in real life; b) are affected by variables in ways similar to how those variables affect behavior in the real world; c) are relatively unaffected by social desirability biases. Constructivism is a theoretical framework from the social cognition perspective that has been fruitful in a number of research areas related to communication studies and could provide new insight into individual differences between more and less successful salespeople.

Constructivism, Cognitive Complexity, and Communication-Related Abilities

Constructivism is a theory of human communication rooted in the perspective of human sense-making and is an interpretive process of individual differences in interpersonal cognitions that has been identified as a research exemplar due to its rich
tradition of application (Nicotera, 1995; Burleson, 1989). Constructivism gives attention to the analysis of social interactions through the interrelations among, and stable individual differences in, cognitive and behavioral processes (Applegate, 1980). The “constructivist paradigm” in communication has been estimated to be the foundational impetus to approximately 500 conference papers, dissertations, and publications (Leichty, Willihnganz, & Hart, 2002). At the heart of constructivist conceptions of communication is that messages have influence and people communicate based upon interaction goals such as persuading or the negotiation of relationships (Applegate & Leichty, 1984). Constructivist research has documented an array of findings linking cognitive differentiation to a variety of communication and communication related abilities such as persuasion, perspective-taking, and comforting strategies (Sypher & Sypher, 1988a).

According to Clark (1979), this orientation 1) helps seek a richer understanding of potential strategies available and 2) understanding variables which influence choice.

Constructivist research is heavily influenced by psychology, social psychology, and cognitive theory. Constructivist theory is consistent with Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) contention that knowledge is created through socially created realities whereby the world is understood through language and the human’s cognitive apparatus based on language. Constructivist research is interested in cognition, or thinking, as it relates to communication. From a constructivist perspective, reality is socially constructed and individually interpreted. Thus, an individual’s knowledge is created both individually and collectively. Based on cognitivism, individuals interpret, shape, and make sense of social interactions by utilizing learned interpretive schemes that involve meaning analysis, memory storage and retrieval, and output formulation (Greene, 1984).
Constructivist scholars have been influenced by Kelly’s (1955) theory of personal constructs that essentially argues individuals give structure and meaning to the world by grouping events and experiences based upon similarities and differences. According to Kelly, constructs (e.g. friendly, unfriendly, tall, short, etc.) are the contrasts that individuals use to group events (Delia, O’Keefe, & O’Keefe, 1982). Consequently, the nature of a person’s impression of another person and/or social situation will be a result of an individual’s interpersonal construct system (Delia, 1976; Applegate & Delia, 1980).

Constructivist theory is used to investigate how human beings create systems of meaning to understand the world and lived experiences (Raskin, 2002). The foundation of constructivist theory is that humans are interpretive beings reliant on sense-making through their cognitive processes where the individual never confronts reality directly, but always through his/her interpretive schemes (O’Keefe, Delia, & O’Keefe, 1980). These interpretive schemes are knowledge systems sometimes also referred to as “personal constructs”, “cognitive structures”, or “cognitive templates” that are used to understand and characterize information (O’Keefe, Delia, & O’Keefe, 1980; Kovacic, 1995; Nicotera, 1995). In other words, individuals process and assign meaning to information based on their existing knowledge structures in order to understand and to interpret their surroundings and their conversations in which they are engaged. The perspective holds that individuals possess behavior, linguistic skill, and socio-cognitive skills to formulate different messages that are adapted to different listeners over time (Applegate & Delia, 1980). An individual’s understanding of other people, based upon the individual’s application of interpersonal constructs, always comes from interpreted images or impressions that are never a full reflection of actual reality because individuals
are incapable of directly apprehend another’s intentions, inner qualities, or attitudes (Delia, 1976).

Delia (1977) similarly describes the constructivist approach as stressing the interplay of shared and interpretive processes by which individuals define situations, construe the perspectives of others, and coordinate the creation of shared meaning, knowledge, and behavior through interaction and the use of communication. An individual’s cognitive structures allow for interpretation and influence behavior and thus account for different individual strategies in communication (Kovacic, 1995). Individuals produce and comprehend messages based on these knowledge structures they have developed and stored through cognitive process and reflexive effects like previous interactions and experiences with a given stimuli, inferences, and learned social knowledge (Sypher & Higgins, 1989).

An individual’s cognitive structures allow him or her to recognize the thoughts, feelings, and needs of another as a relevant obstacle to his or her own communicative goals during an interaction (Waltman, 2002). Through interpretive cognitive schemes, individuals “channelize” their experiences into usable units of interpreted beliefs and corresponding behaviors about the world that influence, create, and control activities like communication strategies by providing general rules and specific guidelines for particular situations during social interaction (Delia, O’Keefe, & O’Keefe, 1982; Nicotera, 1995). Through development and socialization, an individual’s cognitive system becomes more complex, more organized, and more abstract. This increased abstractness is reflected in the shift from concrete behavioral constructs toward psychological and motivational constructs, an increasing comprehensiveness of constructs, and a movement away from
global evaluations (Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1982). It is important to note that according to the constructivist perspective, a person’s individual system of constructs change and develop with age and social experience (Delia, Kline, & Burleson, 1979).

The constructivist research process is referred to as “reflective empiricism” aimed at understanding and interpreting the links between an individual’s cognitive maps, message production, and consequences of persuasive strategies so that message comprehension can be identified, analyzed, and taught (Kovacic, 1995). Constructivists believe an empirical world does exist and can be learned about but the process of learning about it cannot be independent of the interpretive framework employed. Constructivists call for the use of free response data, utilize psychometric instruments for measurement, and advocate triangulated research depending on their research question and phenomenon being studied (Nicotera, 1995). Constructivist research has used a variety of methodologies that include traditional experimental design (e.g., Delia & Crockett, 1973), role playing, interviews, and interaction analysis (e.g., Delia, Clark, & Switzer, 1979), naturalistic observation (e.g., Clark, 1980), and ethnographic analysis (Applegate, 1980).

However, as Waltman (2002) notes, the methodological commitments in constructivism research typically include: a) hypothetical scenarios accompanied with directions for participants to construct a message in response to those scenarios; b) a unit of analysis that identifies message strategies within responses; c) the coding of message strategies for the degree of person-centeredness within hierarchically ordered sets of categories; d) the study of individual differences that influence the ability to create person-centered social influence messages; e) a commitment to study research
participants’ unique constructions of their social world using free-response data to assess relevant individual difference variables thought to influence person-centered communication skills. Among these individual difference variables, cognitive complexity has been one of the most studied by communication scholars (Daly, 2002).

**Cognitive Complexity and Person-centered Persuasive Communication**

Cognitive complexity, simply stated, suggests that individuals differ in their social-cognitive abilities. Cognitive complexity is understood as an information-processing variable that indexes the level of sophistication with which individuals recognize, distinguish, and process information about the social world around them (Samter, 2002). As discussed, based on constructivism, an individual relies on his or her interpersonal construct system as the primary source about the behavioral, interpersonal, and psychological characteristics of others and guides his or her communicative choices whereby the individual employs his or her construct system to generate a variety of interpersonal judgments about another person (Delia, O’Keefe, & O’Keefe, 1982). Research has shown that cognitive complexity underlies a wide variety of communication-related abilities, including skill in social perception, message production, message reception, and social interaction (Burleson & Caplan, 1998).

For example, cognitively complex individuals offer more person-centered communication (Applegate, 1980) likely due to a superior ability to perform tasks related to communication that include but are not limited to recognizing affect (e.g., Burleson, 1994); decoding nonverbal behaviors (e.g., Woods, 1996); integrating information (e.g., O’Keefe, Delia, & O’Keefe, 1977); forming more elaborate impressions of others (e.g., Delia, Clark, & Switzer, 1974); being better perspective-takers (Hale & Delia, 1976);
owning a better appreciation of messages that pursue multiple communicative goals in a variety of interpersonal settings (e.g. Samter, Burleson, & Basden-Murphy, 1989); adapting persuasive messages to the unique perspective of the listener (e.g. Clark & Delia, 1977); managing conflict by proposing solutions that will be advantageous to both parties involved (e.g., Samter, 1994); protecting the identity needs of another person while changing his or her behavior (e.g. Leichty & Applegate, 1991); and being better communicators (Hale, 1980).

The constructivist conceptualization of cognitive complexity is based upon Crockett’s (1965) Role Category Questionnaire (RCQ), which is a free-response measurement involving participants’ descriptions of persons well known to them. Responses are coded for the number of interpersonal constructs reflective of cognitive complexity. The RCQ is the central measure of choice for cognitive complexity in constructivist research and can be seen as the “litmus test” of cognitive development whereby respondents are “free” to construct their own impressions rather than respond to a series of scales that provide trait adjectives or checklists as is often done in other types of research methods (Sypher & Sypher, 1988b). Early work in assessing cognitive complexity typically included three attributes of construct system development that included differentiation, abstractness, and organization. However, more recent research has equated cognitive complexity to differentiation only because assessments of different construct system attributes tend to be highly correlated (see Burleson & Caplan, 1998).

The RCQ has proven high levels of validity and reliability (e.g., O’Keefe & Sypher, 1981; O’Keefe, Shepherd, & Streeter, 1982; Sypher & Sypher, 1988b; Burleson, Waltman, & Samter, 1987; Burleson & Waltman, 1988). Further, Burleson, Applegate,
& Delia (1991) have effectively shown cognitive complexity is not loquacity. A further discussion and conceptualization of the RCQ is provided in the subsequent chapter.

A large body of research undertaken by constructivist researchers in communication studies focuses on the association of interpersonal cognitive complexity and person-centered messages. Burleson (1989) refers to person-centered communication as message behavior that reflects awareness of an adaptation to subjective, affective, and relational aspects of communication contexts. Person-centered messages have been found to be more responsive to communication partners, are tailored to the characteristics of the partner and the situational contexts of the interaction, and attend to identity-relevant features of an interaction (Burleson & Caplan, 1998). The speaker’s knowledge/understanding of the listener(s) constitute the basis for selecting among message options to produce a message that is tailored and adapted, as necessary, to the perspective/needs of the listener(s) involved (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982).

Further, key findings illustrating the association between cognitive complexity and the production of person-centered messages have been found to hold across: a) diverse subject populations; b) differences in the media or modality used to assess both construct development and communication behavior, c) differences in the means used to obtain samples of message behaviors; d) different measures of construct system development; e) different aspects of communicative behavior; f) the statistical control of numerous potentially confounding factors; g) different instrumental goals pursued by speakers; and h) different subsidiary objectives implicitly addressed by speakers (Burleson & Caplan, 1998).
One of the most important studies in constructivist research from a communication perspective is Clark and Delia’s (1977) seminal examination of the message production process. Identified by Burleson (1989) as an early research exemplar in the Communication discipline, the study examines the effect of age, interpersonal cognitive complexity, and social perspective-taking skill on the production of “adaptive” or “person-centered” persuasive messages. This study utilized 58 children in second through ninth grades. Participants were asked to develop persuasive messages based on three realistic scenarios. Messages were coded and scored based upon a four-level hierarchy whereby messages that primarily emphasized the needs of the persuader were coded at lower levels and those emphasizing the needs of the one to be persuaded were coded higher. Hale and Delia’s Social Perspectives Task (SPT) was also utilized. Results showed that interpersonal cognitive complexity, perspective-taking, and adaptive persuasive strategies were all associated with chronological age. Cognitive complexity and perspective taking was found to be positively associated with persuasive skill.

More comprehensive assessments of constructivism, cognitive complexity, and person-centered messages have been offered by a number of communication scholars (e.g., Applegate & Delia, 1980; Delia, O’Keefe, & O’Keefe, 1982; Burleson, 1989; Nicotera, 1995; Burleson & Caplan, 1998; Waltman, 2002). Due to the volume of studies, more in-depth examination of individual studies will be limited to those most influential and salient to the study at hand. In particular, theoretical and methodological milestones relating to communication in organizations are presented.
Study of Social Cognition in Organizations

Sypher’s (1981, 1984) work can largely be credited with beginning a line of research utilizing social cognition and communication-related abilities within organizational contexts. While studies examining social cognition and communication-related abilities in organizational contexts are not abundant, the research has been systematic and yielded results applicable to theory and practice building. This line of research typically explores individual social cognition and communicative-related abilities with a given applicable measure of individual success within the organization. Applying a constructivist orientation in organizational settings is an important research stream that can be dedicated toward answering Burleson’s (1987) call for using the perspective to make a difference in people’s everyday lives. Further, Delia, O’Keefe, and O’Keefe (1982) identify constructivism as a theoretical perspective with potential for clarifying the kinds of communication abilities necessary for individual success within organizations.

Jablin (1982) notes that few studies have explored how social cognition affects, and is affected by, organizational communication. Jablin offers employee socialization as important to shaping the norms, expectations, and perspectives of its members. Further, it is concluded that organizational communication and social cognition are important to both employee assimilation and role-making.

Sypher (1984) advocates that communication in organizational research needs to study not only managers but also non-managers, as all employees play important communicative roles. In doing so, Sypher suggests investigations into individual communication behavior in relation to organizational outcomes and human performance.
The scholar states that researchers need to explore the kinds of skills that are important in helping organizational members understand self and other role expectations and thus perform successfully in organizational situations. To answer this question and other related questions, using a social cognitive communicative approach toward conceptualization is advocated over trait and behavioral skills.

Kline and Ceropski (1984) examined individual differences in physicians’ communication in medical practice. Using 46 medical student participants at a medical school, position- and person-centered communication orientations in medical students were examined. The research findings suggest that an individual’s beliefs about his or her roles in a particular context influence message strategies. When the participant’s goal was to regulate, advise, or solicit information from a patient, practitioners who were more interpersonally cognitively complex were more likely to be able to conceive of the patient’s perspectives and used it to form patient-centered strategies. More complex behaviors, such as regulating the behavior of noncompliant patients, an empathetic disposition and a more abstract construct system of participants increased the likelihood of using person-centered strategies over position-centered strategies. Although the researchers did not formally collect information about whether the participants who utilized person-centered communication were more effective than those who were more position-centered in treating patients, the researchers did note the position-centered strategies have been found to be associated with physician effectiveness in medical literature. Therefore, it was reasoned that more cognitively complex individuals who employed more person-centered communication strategies were more effective in patient care.
Sypher, Applegate, and Sypher (1985) review communication and culture from an organizational perspective and discuss the shift to the use of interpretive methods within organizational research. The research agenda advocated by these scholars includes examination of individual differences affecting critical events. In particular, a constructivist orientation toward individual differences in communication is supported.

Sypher and Zorn (1986) then conducted a four-year longitudinal investigation into communication-related abilities and upward mobility for employees of an insurance company. Cognitive differentiation, self-monitoring, perspective-taking, and persuasive ability were all compared to measures of job level and upward mobility. A modified version of the RCQ was utilized where participants were asked to describe a liked and a disliked coworker. A total of 90 employees from a mix of job functions that included systems analysis, sales, law, accounting, maintenance, technical specialties, personnel, and so on participated. All four measurements were shown to be significantly related to job level. Only self-monitoring was not significantly correlated with upward mobility. Correlation and regression analysis showed interpersonal cognitive differentiation was the strongest predictor of job level and upward mobility.

In an article primarily directed at exploring the reliability and validity of the RCQ, Sypher and Sypher (1988b) advocate the use of RCQ in organizational research. The authors review past research that has utilized the RCQ to examine individual differences in organizational-relevant research and praise the use of the RCQ for its ability to be used to not only measure cognitive complexity but also be used for content analysis of participant’s responses. The authors call for the RCQ to be applied in more
organizational research. This call was answered with multiple research studies, with the dissertation in particular.

Sypher, Bostrom, and Seibert (1989) examined the relationships between listening, cognitive differentiation, perspective-taking, self-monitoring, persuasiveness, upward mobility and employee level for 36 employees at an insurance company. Findings showed that listening correlated significantly and positively with both the cognitive and behavioral aspects of communication but short-term listening was more strongly related to the behavioral skills examined (i.e. persuasive arguments and self-monitoring). Better listeners tended to be more successful (i.e. in higher levels and were more upwardly mobile) but were not necessarily in supervisory positions. The researchers concluded listening is related to other communication abilities and to work success.

Zorn (1991) sought to integrate aspects of constructivist theory and transformational-transactional leadership theory. In a study including 73 pairs of small business owners and their employees, findings suggest communication abilities such as construct system development and person-centered message production may play important roles in leader-follower interactions. Zorn advocates investigating the role of other communication-related abilities like self-monitoring as related to transformational leadership.

Penley, Alexander, Jernigan, and Henwood (1991) studied communication as related to the performance of managers within an organizational setting. Participants were comprised of 354 middle and upper level managers of banks. Accuracy in communication or sending messages was found to be significantly associated with
performance. However, manager performance was not found to have an association with either cognitive complexity or perspective taking. There were significant associations between two of the subscales of self-monitoring, introversion and acting ability, and managerial performance. Lower performing managers reported more introversion (lower self-monitoring) and being better able to take on the role of acting (higher in self-monitoring) which is a seemingly inconsistent result. While Snyder’s (1974) self-monitoring scale was utilized, the authors support Lennox and Wolfe’s (1984) recommendation of treating self-monitoring as multidimensional and thus utilizing sub-dimensions rather than a single dimension as is often done in social cognitive studies.

Zimmerman and Applegate (1992) examined five teams in a hospice organization to better understand person-comforting messages employed. There was a total of 39 participants who completed questionnaires utilizing both free-response and forced-choice items that included written responses to two hypothetical comforting situations, the RCQ, questions about training and tenure, perceptions about comforting using a 5-point scale item, and questions pertaining to individual and team outcomes. Results indicate that satisfaction with perceived comforting communication from other team members was positively related to satisfaction with the team’s communication and evaluations of team success. Training was shown to be negatively associated with person-centered comforting messages. Although a positive relationship existed and approached significance, a relationship between cognitive complexity and person-centered comforting message strategies were not found in the study.

Building upon earlier findings, Zimmermann and Applegate (1994) offer a message-centered, multiple-goals approach to studying how social support is
communicated in the workplace. These scholars advocate supportive communication research into recognizing social support as a phenomenon accomplished in organizational member interactions. Also advocated is looking at micro-structures where individual social-cognitive differences in message interpretation and production are examined as well as macro-structures where the organizational and cultural environments where supportive talk is situated.

Zimmermann (1994) focuses on the relationship between individual differences in the content and structure of social-cognitive systems based upon assessments of communication effectiveness and satisfaction within six interdisciplinary hospice healthcare teams. A total of 66 participants completed the RCQ, a question about their role as a member of the team that was coded for themes, and five-point scale questions relating to evaluations of team communication effectiveness and team member satisfaction. Cognitive differentiation was negatively associated with satisfaction, team communication, and desire to stay with the team. In other words, team members with more complex interpersonal construct systems were less satisfied with team communication and more willing to leave the team. The authors also found five thematic categories based on participant’s role definitions that include: position-related responsibilities, task-related interaction, maintenance-related interaction, interaction with organizational members outside the team, and patient/family concerns.

In a particularly salient study, Zorn and Violanti (1996) extend previous research pertaining to interpersonal construct development and persuasive ability associated with individual achievement in organizations. Gender differences were explored as well. The study’s participants were comprised of 394 employees of three organizations holding a
variety of jobs that included accounting, customer service, sales, personnel, stocking, supervision, middle management, and executive management. It should be noted, results were not provided based on differences in these job types. Similar to Sypher and Zorn’s (1986) study, a modified version of the RCQ was used whereby respondents were asked to describe a liked and disliked coworker. Person-centered ability, job level, upward mobility, salary, monetary career achievement, and other demographic information data were also collected. Overall, results showed positive and significant associations between construct system differentiation and job level, upward mobility, salary, and monetary career advancement. Person-centered persuasive communication exhibited a small and significant correlation with job level, salary, and monetary career achievement but was neither positive nor significantly associated with upward mobility. Most of the comparisons between men and women found no significant difference for communication abilities and achievement. However, the relationship between cognitive differentiation and organizational level was greater for men meaning that more cognitively differentiated women were more likely to get promoted than less differentiated women but were not more likely to occupy high level organizational positions. The authors call for further study of monetary career achievement and other indicators of achievement in organizations in relation to communication.

Sypher, Russo, and Hane (2002) examined whether persuasive ability can be enhanced with training, if cognitive differentiation mediates the degree of development, and if differences exist in these areas based on sex. Participants for the study consisted of 70 undergraduate students in four business communication courses at the same university. Cognitive differentiation was measured with the RCQ. Persuasive ability was
measured using a hypothetical business communication task where participants were asked to compose a letter to persuade a new manager to change a staff-reduction decision and retain an assistant administered at the beginning and end of the semester. Results show that an increase in the number of persuasive arguments made resulted after the class but not message sophistication. The less cognitively differentiated students in the class were found to benefit the most. Further, since women have been found to be more highly differentiated than men in previous research (e.g. O’Keefe, 1988) and less differentiated students improved the most, the authors conclude with no surprise that men benefited significantly more from the course than women. An important takeaway of the study is that is suggests that persuasive abilities can be developed in adults.

Nine years ago, Coopman and Applegate (2000) examined social cognitive differentiation among health care team members’ attempts to influence coworkers. A total of seven teams from two hospice locations were included in the study with 36 total participants. RCQ measurements, questions about training, and a role differentiation question similar to that utilized by Kline and Ceropski (1984) were asked of the participants. Additionally, a hypothetical scenario was presented as a result of focus group research asking what each individual member would say to another team member to convince that person to not stop working at the hospice. Results showed participants produced persuasive messages that generally explicitly recognize the perspective of the other. The amount of training and the level of listener-adaptiveness of persuasive message strategy were found to be negatively associated. Role differentiation was found to be most positively and significantly related to sophistication of persuasive strategy. Role differentiation and cognitive complexity were positively and significantly
correlated. However, the correlation coefficient did not exceed the limit of .60 or greater needed to establish the two instruments are measuring the same construct. The authors state the lack of a relationship suggests the two measures differ in important ways and should be further examined. The authors further reason that hospice team members’ beliefs about their role on the team may be a more powerful resource in developing a particular message strategy when attempting to influence a coworker than his or her cognitive differentiation. However, the small sample size and the uniqueness of hospice were given as possible reasons why a need to examine the influence of context on message strategy selection more.

*Women and Same-Sex Research in Constructivism*

Certainly, differences relating to communication between genders have been highlighted by communication researchers. Individuals higher in cognitive complexity better orient to situations in terms of instrumental, identity, and relational concerns and can address these concerns when forming communicative goals and message strategies (O’Keefe & Delia, 1985). As mentioned, cognitively complex individuals tend to use more person-centered messages than less complex individuals across a variety of contexts. Salient here, for example, women have often evidenced higher levels of cognitive differentiation than men (e.g., O’Keefe, 1988; Sypher & Sypher, 1988a; Sypher, Russo, Hane, 2002).

However, in research conducted by Zorn and Violanti (1996) examining the relationship of upward mobility and socio-cognitive and communication-related abilities found only the correlation between cognitive differentiation and upward mobility to be significant between men and women. In similar research, women produce higher levels
of person-centered support messages (e.g., Borden, 1979; Burleson, 1982; Burleson & Denton, 1992; Hale, Tighe, & Mongeau, 1997; Samter, 2002; MacGeorge, Gillihan, Samter, Clark, 2003). Women have been found to more likely to provide more and higher quality emotional support and comforting messages (Samter, 1989; Hale Tighe, Mongeau, 1997) and higher levels of person-centeredness (Burleson, 1982). Hale, Tighe, Mongeau (1997) have found that the sex of the target on comforting messages shows females were more sensitive than messages directed toward males.

Further, studies using same-sex participants and women only samples occur with some frequency in related communication studies. Samter (1989) explored the impact certain communication skills, including cognitive complexity and person-centered messages, have on influencing relationships in same-sex friendships. This research spawned a line of constructivist research examining communication skills in same-sex samples from fraternities and sororities (Samter & Burleson, 1990a; Samter & Burleson, 1990b; Burleson & Samter, 1990; Burelson & Samter, 1996) and ethically diverse student populations (Samter & Burleson, 2005). Burleson and Denton (1997) found women’s cognitive complexity was positively associated with their husbands’ liking for them when the marriage was non-distressed and was negatively associated at a significant level with a husbands’ liking for them in distressed marriages. Cognitively complex wives appear to be more effective at attaining their goals than less cognitively complex wives. Winters and Waltman (1997) found that there was no relationship between gender identity and cognitive complexity. However, cognitive differentiation and gender identity were both found to be positively associated with person-centered comforting. Research conducted by Jones and Burleson (2003) found no significant differences between the way men and
women responded to person-centered and comforting messages. Further, the sex of the individual sending the messages was not a moderating factor to how recipients responded.

In communicative sales contexts, Sprowl (1984) found that males use a greater variety of compliance-gaining strategies than women regardless of whether the targeted customer is male or female. This would seem to indicate that men and women have differences in the way they sell. According to Sprowl (1984), women are probably better predictors of the appropriate strategy to employ and thus call to mind fewer strategies in a sales situation than men.

Study Justifications and Proposed Research Questions

The foundational assumption of the current study is that there is something unique about the way top salespeople communicate in comparison to their less successful peers. As discussed above, the act of personal selling has received little attention within communication studies. This void is apparent and is important to address within business and other types of organizational communication studies, especially as the inter-organizational and external communication streams build momentum within scholarly literature. The roles of the sales representative cannot be ignored as a critical ambassador to the organization, an important mouthpiece and representative toward the formation of organizational identity, and often the primary boundary-spanner linking companies to customers. Thus, examining and understanding personal selling interactions is a vital lynchpin to the understanding of inter-organizational communication, external organizational communication, the co-creation of an organization’s identity between
organizational stakeholders and the organization itself, as well as overall organizational success.

Toward this end, based upon the literature review, ten summary observations have been developed that lend justification for the importance of the current study:

1. The study of personal selling is a developing discipline in terms of scholarship ripe for the application and development of theory.
2. Personal selling is an important area of study for communication and organizational studies to consider due to the number of people employed in sales related careers, the changing roles of the sales position, and the various important communicative aspects of the job that include organizational boundary-spanning and customer relationship development.
3. Sales and marketing scholarship seeks clarity toward understanding the elements accounting for individual differences in sales success during personal selling interactions.
4. By its dyadic nature, the personal sales interaction invariably involves interpersonal communication.
5. Adaptive selling has been a much studied line of research in sales and marketing scholarship that suggests successful salespeople are better able to adapt to customer needs during conversations yet this body of work has produced limited results in explaining individual differences in achieving this sales success.
6. Examining cognitive aspects of individual salespeople has been identified as a relatively new and promising line of research within sales and marketing scholarship.
7. Despite communication being a primary ingredient in sales interactions, communication theory has made few formal contributions toward the development of scholarship or the understanding of selling despite its potential to do so.

8. The constructivist paradigm has been identified as a research exemplar in communication studies and poses a framework for research that could be fruitful as far as better understanding the cognitive attributes of successful salespeople.

9. Studying sales interactions answers a call for new, unique, and extended research applying constructivist theory within organizations.

10. Constructivist research has been previously used to describe individual success in organizational settings and could offer insights into areas that might be related to sales performance that include interpersonal social cognition, related communication behaviors, and job roles.

Given these justifications, the proposed study will examine the difference between the cognitive structures of salespeople who are highly skilled versus less-skilled counterparts to see how communication plays a role in sales outcomes. The purpose of this study will be to compare the interpretive schemes as they exist for successful salespeople versus less successful salespeople. Researchers have utilized constructivism to study individuals within organizations but none have focused exclusively upon the organizational sales force. If successful in unpacking the differences in cognitive differences between successful and less successful salespeople, new techniques can be developed to help hire, train, and advance successful sales representatives. Additionally, adding sales knowledge and research to the field will add a much needed yet neglected
stream of research to communication within the workplace. This line of inquiry, will offer both theoretical and practical outcomes in understanding under-explored reasons for sales representative success.

In response, the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: What is the difference between a sales representative’s interpersonal cognitive differentiation and selling performance?

RQ2: What is the difference between a sales representative’s ability to use a more person-centered communication and personal selling performance?

RQ3: What is the difference between a sales representative’s self-monitor rating and selling performance?

RCQ4: What is the difference between a sales representative’s perceptions of organizational roles and selling performance?

RCQ5: What relationship exists between cognitive complexity, person-centered persuasive ability, and organizational roles?
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Overview of Methodology

Given the unique void that this investigation is responding to, prior studies using a constructivist orientation within organizational communication studies are the guiding influences for the methodologies addressed.

Managers at many different companies utilizing a personal sales force were approached for purposes of this study. Most were unwilling to participate due to fears of researcher exposure to proprietary information pertaining to their respective organizations. Other potential companies were deemed unsuitable for participation due to the inadequate size of their sales forces. This is noted as an ongoing concern organizational communication scholarship since its inception at Purdue University (personal communication Cynthia Stohl, May 12, 2008). Therefore, for purposes of this study, the author utilized a personal contact with Mary Kay, Inc. due to the convenience, accessibility, success, and size of the organization’s sales force. The contact referred the researcher to a National Sales Director for Mary Kay, Inc. with joint responsibilities of oversight for Mary Kay’s operations within the state of Ohio.

Considerations for Using Women Only as Participants

Perhaps ideally, both men and women would have been included in this study. Nevertheless, that is not to say that the all female sample cannot make a substantial contribution to the communication literature as has been accomplished with other constructivist samples of women. While a small number of men do work for Mary Kay, Inc., the organization is predominately comprised of women. While using a mix of men and women as participants for this type of study should be undertaken by researchers,
Mary Kay, Inc. still afforded the opportunity to examine an extensive number of actual sales representatives within a single organizational culture. Therefore, Mary Kay, Inc. is a suitable organization to explore the research questions at hand using a sample of exclusively women. As discussed in the literature review, using women only and same-sex participants have precedent in constructivist research.

Participating Organization

Mary Kay Inc. is an international direct seller of beauty and personal care products. The company is the #2 direct sellers of beauty products in the U.S. behind Avon. The company offers more than 200 products including the body care, color cosmetics, facial skin care, fragrance, nail care, and sun protection lines (Colbert, 2008). The company sells in more than 35 international markets. For example, Mary Kay recently announced a $20 million dollar investment in India over a five-year span (Bhattacharya, 2008) and has opened a subsidiary in New Delhi. Mary Kay anticipates its sales consultants that act as beauty advisors will have more success in India than their rivals who have utilized salespersons that strictly sell beauty products.

Relationship-based personal selling has been touted as highly effective in the personal care industry (Choice Demographics, 2006). Independent sales representatives for mainstream brands like Mary Kay have been able to generate billions of dollars in revenue in the U.S. and across the globe. Mary Kay’s sales force is comprised of registered “Independent Beauty Consultants” who are contracted to sell directly to customers. These independent sales representatives work on their own schedule, typically selling Mary Kay products at home, parties, or work. The company’s global sales force exceeds 1.8 million (Mary Kay Inc., 2008a). Independent Beauty Consultants essentially
run their own businesses allowing flexibility for setting schedules and working from home. Mary Kay supports its staff with products, education, corporate events, marketing tools, and network support.

The company uses objective sales data to track employee performance. The sales force is paid based on commission from two primary activities of selling products and recruiting new employees to sell products for the company. The company also spends more than $50 million annually on rewards and prize incentives for the independent sales force that includes but is not limited to jewelry, electronics, travel, and their famous pink career cars (Mary Kay Inc., 2008b).

Upward mobility in the company is based upon both sales performance and recruiting other individuals to sell products in the company. While there are ten different sales-related job titles in the company, Mary Kay employees can be thought of as existing on two primary performance plateau levels of Consultant and Sales Directors. More than 33,000 women across the world have reached the status of Independent Sales Directors and 14,000 of them are in the United States (Mary Kay Inc., 2008c). Approximately 500 women worldwide have reached the highest status of within the independent sales force called “Independent National Sales Directors” (Mary Kay Inc., 2008c).

Participants

Data was collected from sales representatives attending Mary Kay’s annual conference and retreat in Columbus, Ohio. Two screening criteria were used to pull participants for the study that included: a) having a minimum of one full year of sales and recruiting data (a minimum of 12 months) and b) the participant must work on a weekly basis to sell Mary Kay products. Ensuring each participant had at least one year of data
allowed for relevant comparisons to be made in evaluating performance in relation to organizational peers. Similarly, since individuals working at Mary Kay often work at the organization as a side job and often hold other careers, identifying those individuals that work at a minimum weekly helps make a certain a level of dedication to selling exists for comparative purposes among participants.

Procedure

Data was collected during a weekend conference and retreat open to Mary Kay, Inc. employees in Ohio. Forty minutes were allocated on the second day of the conference for distribution and completion of the questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed and collected individually in a sealed envelope. Each participant was asked to complete the Role Category Questionnaire of cognitive complexity (see Appendix 4), the “Sue Greenbacks” persuasive email for person-centered persuasive ability (see Appendix 5), the Lennox and Wolf revised scale for self-monitoring (see Appendix 6), and perception of organizational role task (see Appendix 7).

Of the 162 women registered for the conference, 81 met the aforementioned criteria for participation and agreed to complete the questionnaire. Four additional questionnaires were obtained from participants considered top sales representatives and wishing to participate but were unable to attend the conference. A total of 85 questionnaires collected.

Upon receipt, each questionnaire was assigned and stamped with a numbered code on the cover sheet, main questionnaire, and Human Subjects Review agreement. The cover sheet and Human Subjects Review agreement was removed from each questionnaire and placed back into binders. All materials are kept in a locked cabinet.
Three of the independent variables examined in this study (cognitive
differentiation, person-centered persuasive ability, and organizational role differentiation)
were measured using a content analysis of participant responses to the study’s
questionnaire. Two independent coders were used for analysis. At the time of coding,
both coders held a Masters degree-level of education, one in Communication Studies and
the other in Sociology, respectively. Both coders had prior research coding experience.

For each of the coded variables, extensive training and discussion was
undertaken. After discussion and coding two examples together, a pilot test was
undertaken using ten questionnaires. Coders were asked to mark any responses they had
difficulty coding. After a discussion and clarification relating to any discrepancies, 20
percent of the sample was coded and tested for reliability. Additional details for the
conceptualization and operationalization of each measure is discussed below.

Measures

Cognitive Differentiation

Cognitive differentiation of Mary Kay’s sales representatives was measured using
the two-peer version of Crockett’s (1965) Role Category Questionnaire (RCQ). RCQ is a
free-response instrument that asks subjects to describe a liked and disliked peer in as
much detail as possible. Participants were instructed to take only five minutes to write
impressions but time limits were not enforced. As reported by O’Keefe, Shepherd, and
Streeter (1981), the timed and untimed reliability of the RCQ have a correlation of .84
and thus either can and has been used by researchers.

Research has indicated that reliable estimates of the construct system can be
obtained from as few as two interpersonal impressions (Burelson & Waltman, 1988).
Despite various criticisms of the RCQ (e.g., Beatty & Payne, 1984; Hines, 1995; Allen, Burrell, Kellermann, 1993), constructivist theorists have largely been successful in defending the RCQ as well as providing evidence to the validity and reliability of the measurement (e.g. O’Keefe & Sypher, 1981; O’Keefe, Shepherd, & Streeter, 1982; Sypher & Sypher, 1988b; Burleson, Waltman, & Samter, 1987; Burleson & Waltman, 1988).

Responses were coded for the number of interpersonal constructs reflective of cognitive differentiation. Two independent coders counted the number of distinct constructs embedded within the free-response descriptions of liked and disliked others. In other words, distinct constructs were identified as the units of analysis. The liked and disliked scores combine to create the RCQ score for each participant. Sales representatives with higher scores are considered more cognitively differentiated because they possess a more developed cognitive system used for perceiving others.

Scoring procedures as outlined by Burleson and Waltman (1988) were utilized by two independent coders. A copy of the RCQ, as set forth by Burleson and Waltman (1988), can be found in Appendix 4. The two coders independently scored 20 percent of questionnaires with reliability by Pearson correlation of .99 (88% exact agreement). Overall scores on this measure ranged from 2 to 40, with a mean of 16.23 and a standard deviation of 6.923.

**Persuasive Flexibility and Listener-Adaptive Communication**

A hypothetical selling communication task was used to assess the persuasive flexibility and listener-adaptive communication of Mary-Kay sales representatives. The National Sales Director at Mary Kay was consulted as to the most appropriate scenario
for effectively capturing a written persuasive task from sales representatives. Since sales representatives at Mary Kay work relatively autonomously, many of the persuasive scenarios typically used in organizational studies were decidedly too oriented toward creating a persuasive messages targeted for persuading other co-workers (e.g., Sypher, Russo, Hane, 2002). Thus, participants were asked to compose a persuasive sales email to simulate a customer interaction with a potential customer. Participants were asked to provide a written response to a hypothetical sales situation involving a fictitious target customer named Sue Greenbacks. The template for this exercise is the “Tex Greenbacks” persuasive arguments task originally developed by O’Keefe and Delia (1979).

Researchers have analyzed persuasive arguments for both the quantity and quality of the message created by participants. The quantity of arguments, often referred to as persuasive ability but labeled here as persuasive flexibility, is measured by counting the number of arguments or appeals generated (e.g., O’Keefe & Delia, 1979; Sypher & Zorn, 1986; Zorn & Violanti, 1992). The two coders independently scored 20 percent of questionnaires with reliability by Pearson correlation of .99 (88% exact agreement). Overall scores on this measure ranged from 1 to 8, with a mean of 3.68 and a standard deviation of 1.45.

Listener-adaptive communication, or quality of the appeal, has been measured by researchers who have adapted various but similar hierarchal coding schemes for examining person-centered communication. For example, O’Keefe, Murphy, Meyers, and Babrow (1989) used a four-point scheme while Zorn and Violanti (1992) have used a ten-category scale. While variations exist for measuring message person-centeredness, findings have consistently correlated with cognitive differentiation and the reliability of
each of the methods used is notably strong, pointing to the adaptability, strength, and resiliency of the measure (Crawford & Strohkirch, 2004).

For the current study, Delia, Kline, and Burleson’s (1979) nine-level hierarchy was chosen to measure listener-adaptive communication for identifying the degree to which messages take the perspective of the message’s intended target. The system contains three major levels, with hierarchically-ordered sublevels within each of the three major levels, reflecting the extent to which a persuader recognizes or adapts to the persuasive target. This procedure was developed to examine messages intended to persuade (Burleson, 1989) and has been used to study person-centeredness within organizational settings (e.g. Coopman & Applegate, 2000).

Coders were asked to first identify the number of arguments, appeals, and/or persuasive message strategies employed in each email completed by respondents. Next, coders were asked to record the highest score utilized in the persuasive email based on the Delia, Kline, and Burleson nine-level hierarchy (1979). Two coders independently scored 20 of the same questionnaires yielding exact agreement for the highest strategy employed. Overall scores on this measure ranged from 2 to 8, with a mean of 4.65 and a standard deviation of 2.013.

Self-Monitoring

One tactic that has been argued as being particularly influential in interpersonal communicative contexts is self-monitoring. Individuals that are high-self monitors are considered able to consciously control their expressive behavior and self-presentation for the sake of preferable public appearance and are highly responsive to social cues appropriate for performance in interpersonal situations (Snyder, 1974). The most popular
measurement of self-monitoring among constructivist research has been Snyder’s (1974; 1979) Self-Monitoring scale. This scale has also had popularity among psychology, sales, and marketing scholars. With the measure, higher scores indicate a person is more able to attend to social contexts when planning a behavior as, according to Snyder, they are more sensitive and responsive to situational appropriate interpersonal cues than low self-monitors.

Weitz (1981) proposes that self-monitoring could be closely related to adaptive behaviors. This scholar suggests that based on Snyder’s (1974) self-monitoring scale, research might show high self-monitors to be more adaptive in sales situations. In practice, Snyder’s scale has found mixed results. In a study conducted by Sypher and Zorn (1986) investigating communication-related abilities and upward mobility, the authors failed to find a significant relationship between self-monitoring and perspective taking. Similarly, sales researchers have also failed to find significant differences associated with job performance (e.g., Caldwell & O’Reilly, 1982; Dubinsky & Hartley, 1986; Spiro & Weitz, 1990). Sypher and Zorn (1986) concluded that the nature of the questionnaire might not lend itself to demonstrations of communication ability as achieved by free-response data.

While this may be a plausible assumption, sales researchers Goolsby, Lagace, and Boorom (1992) argue Snyder’s scale measures self-monitoring as a unidimensional construct and thus propose using an alternative revised scale for measuring self-monitoring developed by Lennox and Wolf (1984). The revised scale uses two constructs to measure self-monitoring. Other researchers, such as Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka (2007), have found significant differences related to the revised scale of self-monitoring
and sales success. Therefore, utilizing the Lennox and Wolf (1984) measure is important to help determine whether developing alternative conceptualizations would be useful in conjunction with constructivist research. Lennox and Wolfe’s revised self-monitoring scale can be found in Appendix 6. Overall scores on this measure ranged from 26 to 59, with a mean of 46.2 and a standard deviation of 6.32.

Organizational Role Differentiation

Following the research of Kline and Ceropski (1984), sales professionals were asked to respond to the following question: “How would you define your role as a member of the sales team at Mary Kay, Inc.” This question can also be found restated in Appendix 7.

Role differentiation was scored according to Kline and Ceropski’s procedures based on the number of discrete activities, intentions or attitudes used by the sales representative to describe his/her perceived role within the contexts of the organization. Hence, the unit of analysis for role differentiation is individual activities, intentions, or attitudes used by the respondent. Two independent coders aided in the scoring of respondent answers. Two coders independently scored 20 percent of the same questionnaires yielding an intercoder reliability with Pearson’s correlation of .99 (94% exact agreement). Overall scores on this measure ranged from 1 to 13, with a mean of 3.88 and a standard deviation of 2.109. Additionally, as done by Coopman and Applegate (2000), coders were asked to identify thematic categories, if any, within the data.
Sales Performance

Extensive discussions toward which types of measures should be utilized for sales representative performance have been undertaken by various authors (e.g., Rich, Bommer, McKenzie, Podsakoff, & Johnson, 1999; Churchill, Ford, Hartley, & Walker, 1985; Plank and Reid, 1994). However, measuring sales performance based on the metrics utilized by the organization, itself, to track and judge sales performance makes a lot of sense when comparing the relative success of individuals engaged sales. Sales success is likely to vary by position, organization, and industry. Therefore, the Independent National Sales Director responsible for overseeing all of the Independent Sales Directors for the state of the Ohio agreed to aid the researcher identifying top sellers from the rest of the participants.

In accordance with Mary Kay’s reward system, the top twenty performers were identified for the state of Ohio. All twenty top performers were among the sales directors. Ten of these women participated at the conference. Ten additional top performers were identified by the National Sales Director were contacted to participate in the study who did not attend the conference. Seven additional top sales representatives participated. Thus, seventeen of twenty identified top sales representatives participated.
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the investigation. The conclusions and implications are discussed in the final chapter. This study was conducted to understand the differences between socio-cognitive communicative structures and sales performance. After a preliminary overview, findings are organized in the order of the five proposed research questions from Chapter 1. SPSS was used for data analysis.

Differences of the first four research questions were analyzed using independent sample t-tests similar to previous research examining loneliness in low-skill and high-skill friend pairs (i.e., Burleson & Samter, 1996), differences between male and female RCQ scores (i.e., Adams-Webber, 2000), and interactive coping behaviors of Chinese men and women (i.e., Burelson, Liu, Liu, & Mortenson, 2006). Since the samples sizes of the number of elite performers is not equal to their peers at Mary Kay, equal variances are not assumed.

In addition to the independent sample t-test, the content of the responses to organizational roles was also examined for RCQ4. While this analysis is beyond the scope of RCQ4, content analysis into the responses may greater inform the researcher to how sales representatives define their role as part of the organizational team. Zimmer (1994) conducted a similar analysis of health care team effectiveness and found five thematic categories emergent from the data.

Pearson product-moment correlations were used to analyze RCQ5. Pearson product-moment correlations are commonly used by constructivist researchers to assess relationships among variables. For example, Applegate (1982) employed a constructivist approach to examine the impact of construct system development of communication and
impression formation in persuasive contexts. Cognitive complexity, number of persuasive strategies, and highest level of listener-adaptive persuasive strategies were among the variables included in the Pearson Correlation. In another related study, Sypher and Zorn (1986) used Pearson correlations to examine relationship between social cognitive and communication abilities including cognitive differentiation, perspective-taking, self-monitoring, and persuasive ability in research examining communication-related abilities and upward mobility. A discussion of the results follows in the same order as the corresponding research questions.

**Interpersonal Cognitive Differentiation and Selling Performance**

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine the differences between cognitive differentiation and selling performance. Cognitive differentiation scores were obtained using the RCQ and selling performance was comprised of two categories of the sales representatives not in the elite performers category, henceforth referred to as “peers” (n = 64) and “elite performers” (n = 17). There was not a significant difference between the cognitive complexity of peers (M = 15.69, SD = 6.09) and elite performers (M = 18.29, SD = 9.39), $t(19.71) = -1.09$, $p = .29$.

**Person-Centered Persuasive Ability and Selling Performance**

Two measures were examined to assess the difference between two measures of persuasive abilities and selling performance. First, an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine the difference between persuasive flexibility and selling performance. Persuasive flexibility scores were obtained using the number of distinct arguments and selling performance of peers (n = 56) and elite performers (n = 13). A
significant difference between the number of arguments generated by peers ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.12$) and elite performers ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 2.02$), $t(13.77) = -2.64$, $p < .05$.

Next, an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine the difference between listener-adaptive communication and selling performance. Listener-adaptive scores were obtained using the highest persuasive level used and selling performance was comprised of two categories of peers ($n = 56$) and elite performers ($n = 13$). A significant difference between peers ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.97$) and elite performers ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 1.82$) on the persuasive ability measure $t(19.11) = -2.59$, $p < .05$.

Revised Self-Monitor Rating and Selling Performance

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine the difference between self-monitoring and selling performance. Self-monitor ratings were obtained using the revised self-monitoring scale and selling performance was comprised of two categories of peers ($n = 67$) and elite performers ($n = 17$). A significant difference between peers ($M = 45.46$, $SD = 6.50$) and elite performers ($M = 49.12$, $SD = 4.66$) was found on the revised self-monitoring measure $t(33.68) = -2.65$, $p < .05$.

Perceptions of Organizational Roles and Selling Performance

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine the difference between organizational roles and selling performance. Organizational roles scores were obtained using the number of distinct roles used and selling performance of peers ($n = 61$) and elite performers ($n = 16$). A significant difference between peers ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.65$) and elite performers ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 3.06$) was found on the persuasive ability measure $t(17.35) = .05$, $p < .05$. 
Although beyond the scope of the current research question, the responses to organizational roles were analyzed for thematic categories. Similar to organizational communication research conducted by Zimmer (1994), the content of the responses to the role differentiation measure was examined. The two coders identified similar themes and categories. Five themes or categories emerged from the data: Position-related task activities and roles (e.g. “sell product” and “teach skin care and cosmetics”); personal characteristics and responsibilities for success (e.g. “be an honest sales person” and “use the Golden Rule”); act as a positive organizational representative (e.g. “promote the company’s ideals” and “Be a walking billboard for Mary Kay products and legacy”); work within a team (e.g. “work together as a sales team” and “share experiences with coworkers”); and empower / help women (e.g. “enrich and empower women” and “make (women) look and feel beautiful and important”).

Each of the individual roles was assigned to one of the five categories. Table 1 shows the frequencies and overall percentages for each of the categories for elite sales representatives, their peers, and totals. Position-related roles were the most frequently mentioned category mentioned by both elite sales representatives and sales representatives. Elite sales representatives have a larger percentage of position-related roles (56.6%) and team-oriented roles (13.3%) in comparison to their peers (41.2% and 7.4%, respectively).
Table 1

**Respondent Frequencies of Organizational Role Themes or Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Peers (n=16)</th>
<th>Elite (n=61)</th>
<th>Totals (n=77)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position-related</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. Rep.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>216</td>
<td>99.1</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relationship Between Social Cognitive and Communication-Related Abilities**

Table 2 shows the correlation matrix for social cognitive and communication-related abilities. These correlations show that cognitive complexity is significantly and positively correlated with both of the persuasion measures and organizational role but not with self-monitoring. Persuasive flexibility is positively and significantly correlated with all four of the other measures. The strongest correlations were between persuasive flexibility and listener-adaptive communication ($r = .561$) and persuasive flexibility and organizational role ($r = .468$). Listener-adaptive communication is not correlated with organizational role but is significantly positively correlated with self-monitoring. The revised self-monitoring scale is positively and significantly correlated with the persuasive measures but not with cognitive differentiation or organizational role.
Table 2

*Pearson Correlation Matrix for Social Cognitive and Communication-Related Abilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cognitive Complexity</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>.301*</td>
<td>.252*</td>
<td>.423**</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Persuasive Flexibility</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>.561**</td>
<td>.468**</td>
<td>.309**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Listener-Adaptive Communication</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.243*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organizational Role</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
<td>.170</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Revised Self-Monitoring</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. ** p < .01 (two-tailed) * p < .05 (two-tailed)*
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Researchers have called for the application of constructivist theory to determine communicative abilities associated with desired social outcomes (Burleson, 1987; Zorn & Violanti, 1996). From a communication perspective, Burleson (1987) argued that constructivists need to establish how communicative-related abilities, such as person-centeredness, make a difference in people’s lives. This study applied constructivist theory using actual sales representatives. The current study examined social cognitive and communication-related abilities as related to the performance of sales representatives. In addition to supporting established relationships from previous constructivist research, the current findings were derivative from real work situations where sales representatives were asked to perform communication tasks related to their daily work lives.

Five research questions were advanced. Consistent with previous constructivist research, interpersonal construct differentiation, persuasive flexibility, and listener-adaptive communication were found to be positively related. The association between cognitive complexity and the production of person-centered messages has proven to hold across diverse populations, including the statistical control of numerosely confounding factors such as age, sex, social class, verbal and intellectual abilities, personality traits, and motivational orientations (Burleson & Caplan, 1998). The results of this study were intended to extend constructivist research and point to several considerations relating to the nature of the communicative abilities of higher performing sales representatives. The study also extends the use of constructivist theory within organizational settings and the results of this investigation support a link between nearly all of the communicative abilities studied and sales performance.
Significant differences were found between elite sales performers and their peers for nearly all of the communicative-related measures examined. The lone exception, cognitive complexity, was not found to be significantly different for top sales representatives in the current project. Cognitive complexity does not appear to be related to sales success for Mary Kay representatives. The development of a highly differentiated system of constructs does not appear to be influential in the success of the elite sales reps at Mary Kay as compared to their peers. However, significant differences between elite sale representatives and their peers were found for both persuasive flexibility and listener-adaptive communication.

The lack of a statistically significant relationship between cognitive complexity and performance is surprising, especially considering interpersonal constructs have been found to be related to the level of perspective-taking in persuasive strategies in foundational constructivist research (e.g., Clark & Delia, 1977; Delia, Kline, Burleson, 1979) as well as in the current study. While interpersonal construct systems are the foundation that individuals build repertoires of strategies for adapting to actions, researchers have pointed out these constructs alone do not serve the sole basis for producing adaptive communication strategies (Delia, O’Keefe, & O’Keefe, 1982). Thus, while elite sales reps and their peers may be similar in ability to build repertoires of strategies (cognitive differentiation), elite sellers appear better able to develop a greater number of persuasive strategies that are more person-centered for adapting to a potential customer.

Additionally, constructivist researchers suggest that organizational and/or professional socialization factors as well as length of service may influence interpersonal
construct system structures and message production (e.g., Coopman & Applegate, 2000). Given the majority of the respondents were attending a weekend training seminar, this socialization may be one explanation of why persuasive measures differed significantly but cognitive differentiation did not differ significantly between elite performers and their peers. Additional research into the role of cognitive complexity remains intriguing as relating to sales success and further research is promising and necessary.

The persuasive measures used in this study were found to positively and significantly differ for elite performers than their peers. Persuasive ability, or the number of constructs offered by a respondent, has been described as a demonstration of communicative flexibility to generate a large number of message strategies (e.g., Burleson, 1982; Delia & O’Keefe, 1979; O’Keefe & Delia, 1979). Person-centeredness has been conceptualized as the structures of message content most geared toward the recipient of the message (e.g., Delia, Clark, & Switzer, 1979; Samter & Burleson, 1984). Since personal selling is fundamentally a persuasive episode, finding elite performers to be better persuaders than their peers could be anticipated. Nonetheless, these findings are confirmatory and support previous research linking organizational achievement and constructivist conceptualizations of communicative-persuasive measures. Further, these findings indicate elite sales representatives are better able to generate more persuasive strategies that are more tailored to the perspective of others.

The most popular measurement of self-monitoring among constructivist researchers has been Snyder’s (1974; 1979) Self-Monitoring scale. In research similar to the current study conducted by Sypher and Zorn (1986) examining communication-related abilities and upward mobility, Snyder’s Self-Monitoring scale was used. The
researchers failed to find a significant relationship between self-monitoring and perspective taking. The researchers suspected the self-monitoring instrument as the explanation for not finding a significant relationship. Sales and marketing researchers (e.g., Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2007), have found significant relationships related to self-monitoring and sales success using the Revised Self-Monitoring Scale offered by Lennox and Wolfe (1984).

For the current study, the Revised Self-Monitoring Scale was utilized. Elite sales performers were found to have significantly higher self-monitoring scores in the current study. The theory of self-monitoring presumes differences between individuals to the extent they regulate their self-presentation by tailoring actions in accordance with immediate situational cues (Snyder, 1974; Snyder 1979). Hence, high self-monitors are considered better able to regulate their self-presentation for the sake of desired public appearances who are highly responsive to situational social cues. This theory suggests individuals that are high self-monitors should be able to use their insights to their advantage in various contexts, including sales situations.

In Sypher and Zorn’s (1986) research, a significant relationship was found between cognitive complexity and self-monitoring but a significant relationship was not found in the two persuasive measures. In contrast, the current study found a significant relationship between the Revised Self-Monitoring Scale and the persuasive measures but significance was not found with self-monitoring or organizational role. While confirmatory research is still necessary, the separation of the original Snyder scale into the Revised Self-Monitoring Scale and Concern for Appropriateness Scale by Lennox and Wolfe may explain the observed difference. If so, future research should show the
Revised Self-Monitoring Scale to be correlated to persuasion measures, as found in the current study, and the Concern for Appropriateness Scale correlated with cognitive complexity.

In comparing organizational roles, elite sales performers described a greater number of roles than their peers. Here, elite performers displayed a greater ability to more effectively describe and define their role as members of the sales force. Although beyond the scope of the posed research question, the content of the responses to organizational role was further examined for themes or categories. Position-related task activities and roles, personal characteristics and responsibilities for success, acting as a positive organizational representative, working within a team, and empowering / helping women were the five themes that arose from the data. Examining the content of the responses provides some additional insight into how elite performers differ from peers. Both groups most frequently listed position-related tasks and duties. However, elite performers listed both position-related tasks and team-oriented roles on a higher percentage than peers.

Organizational role was found to be significantly related to cognitive complexity and persuasive ability but not to person-centeredness or self-monitoring. These results seem logical. An individual who has high cognitive differentiation would seemingly be better able to generate a higher number of persuasive strategies and be more able to generate higher descriptions of their respective organizations. However, a more robust understanding of one’s organizational role is probably not going be related to creating person-centered messages or be related to an individual’s self-monitoring score in a meaningful way.
Limitations and Considerations

The nature of the sales organization studied, Mary Kay Inc., presented considerations and limitations to the findings. The first limitation of this study is that the individual’s tenure as a Mary Kay representative was not measured. The National Sales Director that assisted in the development and distribution of the questionnaire for Mary Kay employees insisted tenure was not a factor in determining elite performers. In fact, the national Sales Director did not keep data relating to length of service for her employees. Tenure could potentially be a significant variable in this study for sales success. Future research should examine tenure as a mitigating variable in relation to the communication-related variables and sales success.

Second, Mary Kay is comprised of an almost exclusively all woman sales force that sells predominately to other women. As discussed, using same-sex samples has precedence in constructivist research. Further, research conducted by Zorn and Violanti (1996) into communication abilities of sex as related individual achievement in organizations found minimal difference between communication-relevant abilities and individual achievement. Yet examining similarities and differences between the sales success of men and women is important for continued examination.

A third consideration is Mary Kay is not a traditional, full-time sales force. Many women at Mary Kay work for the company as a source of extra income rather than as a career. While Mary Kay’s sales representatives are members of the Mary Kay organization, the employees operate essentially as independent businesses. Mary Kay sales representatives do not “come to work” as they typically work out of home and usually visit customers at their homes. While the researcher attempted to combat this
limitation by requiring participants sell products on a weekly basis as a minimum criterion to be eligible for participation, the organization, itself, does not dictate work hours or mandatory sales quotas to employees that are often commonplace in “traditional” sales organizations. Future research should seek to replicate current findings in a more traditional sales environment. Research should also examine how other variables, such as motivation and organizational identification, relate to sales success in traditional and non-structured sales environments.

Finally, acknowledging that Mary Kay defines sales success as being a combination of both selling products and recruiting new members into the Mary Kay sales force is important. Recruiting new members and selling products are both communicative-related acts but may require very different skill sets. While objective sales data for product sales alone could have been used for this research, the objective recruiting data was also used for determining elite sales performers. The reason was twofold. First, according to the National Sales Representative at Mark Kay, the individuals selected as elite performers would not have likely changed in a meaningful way using only one or both criteria. If only product sales were selected as the measurement of success, the elite performer variable would have been comprised of the same people.

Second, achievement in both sales and recruiting performance are what Mary Kay ultimately use as criterion for determining an individual’s selling success in the organization and for purposes of promotion, awards, and compensation. As previously discussed, extensive debates regarding what types of measures should be utilized for sales representative performance have been undertaken by scholars (e.g., Rich, Bommer,
McKenzie, Podsakoff, & Johnson, 1999; Churchill, Ford, Hartley, & Walker, 1985; Plank and Reid, 1994). Since sales success is likely to vary by position, organization, and industry, measuring individual differences using institutional metrics seems logical. Of course, assuming organizations are utilizing the appropriate metrics is another consideration altogether. However, if researchers are going measure individual sales success, we must consider those successes from the environments in which sales representatives are evaluated and identified as successful in their respective organizational cultures.

Future Research Directions

The need for scholarship examining personal selling has been discussed. A strong argument has been built for utilizing communication-related theory in personal selling contexts. Likewise, business communication, in particular, could stand to benefit perpetuating applied studies in specific business settings utilizing theory from business, marketing, communication, and social psychology. Business communication stands to gain by identifying underserved areas of business scholarship that is communication based, such as personal selling, and rigorously investigating these areas with established theory. Provided are additional suggested areas for research.

Exploring sales skills and techniques utilized by successful sales representatives within different products, sales situations, and contexts would provide needed clarity into the important abilities and sales techniques for developing success. Rackham and DeVencentis (1999) suggest a seller’s interaction approach toward customers can be transactional, consultative, and enterprise/partnering. Communicative abilities and sales techniques may differ in importance within these contexts. For example, despite Mary
Kay employees being referred to as “Beauty Consultants”, perhaps the true nature of the product and the sales situation is more transactional in nature and thus less reliant on cognitive differentiation for selling success.

Similarly, this type of research could uncover findings about interpersonal communication. For example, personal selling research using compliance-gaining reviewed in Chapter 1 did not consistently find relationships linking the use of compliance-gaining strategies and sales success. These studies used sales representatives in industries, such as real estate, where the sale would typically be considered more consultative than transactional in nature. Perhaps using compliance-gaining strategies in sales interactions that are more indicative of transactional selling would find greater sales success whereas constructivism may be geared more toward understanding success in consultative selling.

Additional research into socio-cognitive and communicative-related abilities is necessary for studying and understanding personal selling and sales success. As Sypher, Russo, and Hane (2002) demonstrate, traits, such as persuasive ability, can be taught. Exploration of the most effective ways to teach these traits and abilities still need to be further investigated. Other areas of communication theory that may hold promise for studying personal selling interactions and organizational sales forces include but are not limited to: sense-making, network theory, diffusion of innovations, identification, framing, and facework. Further, scholars should compare and contrast sales models in order to make connections, additions, and subtractions to better illustrate how communication can better inform sales-related processes. Scholarship explicitly
explaining how applying theory can help our students, administrators, corporations, and communities needs to be at the forefront of the academy’s efforts.

Conclusion

With the high costs of recruiting and training sales representatives, identifying individual traits that relate to performance is an important undertaking. Yet no single trait or set of traits has been identified as a reliable predictor of performance (Sojka & Deeter-Schmelz, 2008). Personal selling has received surprising little scholarly focus from a communication approach. As proposed in the current study, personal selling scholarship could be greatly influenced by incorporating solid communication-related theory. Further, this study seeks to call attention to the potential for academic mutualism between the study of underserved areas of business scholarship, such as personal selling, and the application of communication theory.

In turn, a good deal of potential to inform personal selling may exist by grounding personal selling in communication theory. Continuing to explore how high performing sales representatives differ in communicative-related ways can have high pay-off for both theory and practice. The current research found higher scores on persuasive flexibility and listener-adaptive communication, self-monitoring, and organizational role to be related to higher sales success. This type of research has implications for teachers, trainers, students, and practitioners involved in personal selling.

This study sought to call attention to the potential of academic mutualism among related disciplines to inform areas of workplace life with the applied use of theory. Based upon the literature review, ten summary observations have been developed that lend justification to the importance of the current study. Top performing sales representatives
had significantly higher scores for the communication-related abilities of persuasive flexibility, listener-adaptive communication, self-monitoring, and organizational role in comparison to their peers. Surprisingly, cognitive complexity was the only measure not found to be significantly related to sales performance. Positive correlations were found between cognitive complexity, both persuasive measures, and organizational role. Positive correlations were found between persuasive flexibility and listener-adaptive communication, organizational role, and the Revised Self-Monitoring Scale. The Revised Self-Monitoring Scale was positively related to both persuasive measures.

This dissertation is important because of its potential contributions in at least five areas. First, this study calls attention to the need for applying communication theory in applied research within personal selling and other business contexts. Second, this study’s findings are consistent with previous constructivist research findings where interpersonal construct differentiation, persuasive flexibility, and listener-adaptive communication were found to be positively related. Third, elite performers were found to have higher scores in persuasive flexibility, listener-adaptive communication, organizational role, and self-monitoring. The significant findings in the two persuasive measures and self-monitoring measure may point to new ways of conceptualizing adaptive selling. Adaptive selling has found strong research support but lackluster results in personal sales scholarship. Fourth, the current study uses the Revised Self-Monitoring Scale. Salient previous research had found a significant relationship with Snyder’s Self-Monitoring Scale and cognitive complexity but not persuasive measures. In the current study, using the Revised Self-Monitoring Scale, a significant relationship was found between the persuasive measures but not found with cognitive-complexity. Fifth, several directions
for future research have been proposed potentially beneficial to communication, business, marketing, social psychology, and other related scholars.

Increasing the likelihood of turnaround from the current economic times for the United States is dependent upon stimulating the flow of goods and services. Examining the evolving ways to which goods and/or services are developed, marketed, bought, and sold is paramount. The development and application of business communication theory may provide real solutions to organizational and societal issues.

Sales representatives are important organizational members for many businesses who generate revenue as well as provide market research and customer feedback. Sales representatives serve as important relation builders and influencers for consumers as well as acting as important sources of organizational identity for many businesses. The actions of sales representatives can have an important ripple effect through not only organizations but also society.

Much work remains to combat the taken-for-granted quintessence of communication within business contexts. Academics in the field need to further examine and explicate ways communication theory can be practically utilized. While organizational communication has shown a migration toward being critical of organizational practices, business communication should seek a more applied approach geared toward explaining processes and solving problems. Business communication should advocate a robust and rigorous methodological orientation. Identifying ways communication can positively impact the functioning of jobs, development of strategy, display of leadership, and overall performance of businesses can help further elevate the status of business communication scholarship.
References


Freese, T. A. (1999). *Secrets of question based selling: How the most powerful tool in business can double your sales record*. Atlanta, GA: QBS.


### Table 1: Studies from a Communication Perspective Examining Personal Selling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Study Synopsis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leathers</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Impression management is proposed as an important communication phenomenon within organizations. The study offers discussion pertaining to the importance of impression management in sales contexts, provides a conceptualization of impression management, and suggests how the provided conceptualization can be used to more effectively train salespeople. Six image dimensions are offered that can be used for sales training that include credibility, likeability, assertiveness, interpersonal attractiveness, truthfulness, and interestingness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontarantonio &amp; Cohen</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>This study examined the communicator style of salespeople by manipulating a sales presentation featuring an “innovative” product. Research showed participants acting as customers preferred the high dominance and low openness combination from sales presentations. In other words, results indicate consumers prefer salespeople who are confident, enthusiastic, and forceful and do not talk too much about themselves. Thus, a “take charge personality” that focuses talk on the product and customer was viewed as a possible ideal communicator-style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dion &amp; Notarantonio</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>The relationship between communicator style and sales success were investigated in a triangulated study. First, in a self-report study of real estate sellers, the researchers found precision to be the most important communication style related to success. Sales performance was measured in terms of numbers of units sold, the contribution to company profits, and the sales representative’s income as supplied by the company. Second, in an experimental design showing video taped simulated car sales interactions, students confirmed the combination of precise and friendly communication style as the most effective. The results of their study showed the <em>precise</em> dimension of communicator style was strongly associated with effective sales performance. None of the other none sub constructs making up the utilized scale was related to sales performance. This study suggests a relationship exists between communication style and effectiveness. Also, the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
authors conclude literature points to a tendency for meaningful interaction among people increases when persons have similar characteristics, tastes, and backgrounds. Thus, the authors conclude blending communicator styles to meet the sales situation may prove to be the most effective method for sales success.

DiSanza (1993) An ethnographic study of strategies was used to motivate tellers to sell bank products and services. The researchers found that managers could help stimulate sales success with tellers by offering framing messages as strategies such as reinforcing those messages with tellers that seemed to aid success.

Comstock & Higgens (1997) Study investigates whether salespeople should adapt to buyers’ communicator style. In study 1, advertising buyers filled out a questionnaire investigating preferences for communication style and relationship messages. Results showed buyers are more interested in task, rather than the social aspects of the buyer-seller relationship. They preferred sellers who are trustworthy, composed, and task-oriented. Buyers’ preferences did not vary across communicator style profiles and suggests adaptive selling might be misguided. Study two asked advertising sellers to assess buyer’s preferences for relational messages and assessed the seller’s communicator style. Results showed sellers are well aware of buyer’s preferences for task related interaction but may overestimate the value of social interaction.

Zorn & Ruccio (1998) This study examined how sales managers and sales people construct and perform motivational communication in an exploratory study. Using a retro-active case-study of six sales teams and their managers at a company, a thematic analysis was conducted on collected semi-structured interview notes and transcripts. Implications about motivational communication resulting from the study suggest managers should develop and use a varied repertoire of communication strategies and not just those aimed at uncertainty reduction, managers must be aware that any communicative act has multiple functions, implications and interpretations so communication attempts must be negotiated and not assumed, and strategies must be considered in light of contexts or cultures in which they are used.
Campbell & Davis (2006) These researchers advocate the use of rapport management as an important part of the communicative interaction between the buyer and the seller. Rapport allows for an “enjoyable” communicative interaction and builds a level of trust for continuing the relationship. As the researchers discuss in the literature review, a seller’s communication interaction needs to establish rapport or it is less likely to result in a sale. On the flip side, a seller needs to avoid “over doing it” at the risk of making it blatantly obvious of their alternative motive and appearing “slimy” in their communication. Although not discussed here, this seems to indicate the importance of comfort and trust of the customer to establishing a relationship with the sales representative. By looking through sales text books, the researcher lists various communication techniques for overcoming sales objections. As an illustrative example to show the importance of face management and rapport building, the researchers chart a sales interaction taken from a documentary showing how a Bible salesman reduces rapport with the customer and the interaction does not result in a sale. The researchers fail to show evidence that attention to positive face results in a successful sale yet offer and intriguing line of scholarship for research consideration.
Selling has been described by Wilson (1977) as a dyadic, person-to-person exchange process. Communicative exchanges may occur over time in multiple meetings and interactions through multiple stages, as shown in Figure 3. Both parties must be “ready” in the sense the individuals must be willing and able to communicate with the other person. Empathy refers to a cognitive process of taking the role of the other person. Source credibility refers to the trust, confidence, and faith the other person has in the sales representative’s communication, behaviors and actions.

*Figure 3: Wilson (1977) Stages in making a sale*

One of the early models offered for explaining the sales interaction is the Weitz (1978) ISTEA Sales Process Model (Figure 4). The acronym ISTEA represents “impression, strategy, transmission, evaluation, and adjustment” as a sequence of five influence activities. Weitz proposes a sales representative’s ability to develop
impressions occurs through a sales representative’s combination of past experiences in sales interactions with specific relevant impressions of the current customer being interacted with.

*Figure 4: Weitz (1978) ISTEA Sales Process Model*

As the ISTEA model illustrates, communication plays a central role in personal selling. The communicative choices of the sales representative have been shown to be important to how a customer views the intentions of the sales representative. By nature of his or her profession, if a sales representative engaging in personal selling wants to make or keep an account, he or she typically must properly identify the potential or current customer’s needs, based on that person’s level of influence in the organization, and pitch the value of his or her product or service through conversations with a client. A sales representative then must effectively identify the needs of a potential customer in order to ascertain if and how his or her product(s) can meet those needs. A sales
representative must also provide ways in which his or her product(s) and service(s) can help meet a client’s needs through presentation.

Building on the dyadic theme, the contingency framework proposed by Weitz (1981) emphasizes the importance of tailoring sales approaches to specific sales situations and customers during interpersonal interactions. The contingency framework (Figure 5) suggests that sales representative effectiveness is based on four basic elements: a) the behavior of the sales representative in the customer interaction, b) the sales representative’s resources, c) the customer’s buying task, and d) the customer-sales representative relationship. Intrinsic in this approach is the understanding that salespeople must adjust to the specific customer with whom they are interacting.
Prior to the contingency framework, empirical research based on the dyadic approach treated properties relating to selling as relatively static in the customer-salesperson dyad and examined the effectiveness of different types of messages (Weitz, 1981). Newer conceptual models of the sales process explicitly incorporate the notion of adaptive selling in the form of feedback loops and interactions between sales behaviors and characteristics of the sales encounter (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). Williams, Spiro, and Fine (1990) noting little literature exists focusing on interpersonal communication, offer
the Customer-Salesperson Interaction Model (Figure 6). The model has three basic components: the customer, the interaction, and the sales representative.

*Figure 6: Williams, Spiro, & Fine (1990) Customer-Salesperson Interaction Model*

The information processing elements of selective exposure, attention, and retention decoding and encoding, and the interpreter and memory represent a synthesis of a model created by Shannon and Weaver (1949) and the later modified by Schramm (1954) and applied to personal selling by Williams, Spiro, and Fine (1990). Just as the original Shannon and Weaver model provides a useful foundational block for talking about communication processes, the Williams, Spiro, and Fine model demonstrates the communicative nature of personal selling. However, while it is beyond the scope of the current study, scholars must challenge this model just as communication scholars have questioned the Shannon-Weaver and Schramm models as being antiquated and perhaps
unrepresentative of the more cutting-edge, transactional understanding of the communication processes. Work to refine and develop cutting-edge communicative models should be undertaken by communication scholars.

While these sales process models map out the sales process, other models have sought to illustrate the customer interpretation process. These models essentially seek to aid salespeople in thinking through the process of “othering” or advocating taking the perspective of the customer. It is implied through these models that trying to better understand the customer will help guide the sales representative’s communicative efforts.
APPENDIX 3

_Cognitive Models Relating to “Othering” and Customer Interpretation_

As Cooley (1998) and later Mead (1934) suggest, one of the unique capacities of humans is the ability to take the capacity or role of the other. These theorists suggest we can create a mental image of what another is thinking. Similarly, theorists advocate salespeople must develop an understanding of what is important to the customer. Several explanations and models have been proposed to help salespeople better understand and interpret customers. Sales theorists have offered several explanations and descriptions of the interpersonal process and role taking involved with personal selling.

For example, Robinson, Feris, and Wind’s (1967) seminal buyclass taxonomy (Figure 7) suggests the sales representative should consider three dimensions when evaluating customers: a) how much information the prospect must gather to make good decisions, b) the seriousness with which the prospect considers all possible alternatives, and c) how unfamiliar the purchase situation is to the prospect. While scholars have offered modifications to the model (Anderson, Chu, Weitz, 1987; Bunn 1993), conceptually the model remains a useful tool for sales representatives to begin thinking about how to approach different customers.
Petty and Cacioppo (1986) offer the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Figure 8) as a descriptive model for illustrating casual effects of persuasive attempts might have in different situations toward attitude change. ELM states that people think about issue-relevant arguments in persuasive communication at varying degrees of effort. According to Petty and Cacioppo, behavior change is achieved through a rational, deep examination of the argument. In contrast, attitude change through the peripheral route is affected by variables like consequences, rewards, or punishments and little thought is given to the argument’s message. In cognitively processing information, few listeners are motivated and able to do the mental work necessary for a major shift in an attitude or behavior. Thus, ELM helps explain why targets of persuasion messages might pay less attention to the communication rather than the communicator and why speaker credibility effects can dissipate so quickly (Griffin, 2003).
Friestad and Wright (1994) offer the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Figure 9) to illustrate how customers cope with persuasion attempts by marketing agents. According to the theorists, a major task for consumers is to understand and cope with a sales representative’s actions in order to form valid attitudes about the sales representative. The Persuasion Knowledge Model works from the Elaboration Likelihood Model, adding the task of refining attitudes as a basic goal and makes predictions about how resources are allocated, and thus suggests the importance of sales representatives gaining knowledge and using it in persuasion attempts. According to the authors, this model attempts to
illustrate persuasion knowledge and how people use it to interpret, evaluate, and respond to influence attempts from advertisers and salespeople. The model implies people learn from past persuasion attempts and how people in turn use their knowledge impacts their responses to personal selling attempts. Theoretically, a person becoming more familiar with a product that is new to them will act very differently than one who is familiar with a product and both undergo differing cognitive-related changes to evaluate the sales situation. Familiarity with products, for instance, leads to more elaborated knowledge structures due to increased knowledge. Thus, one might assume a sales representative’s communication behaviors are considered important cues to message processing and customer perceptions because they provide signals about the individual sales representative (Friestad & Wright, 1994) and his or her ability to understand and “read” a customer allows for appropriate persuasive strategies. A major portion of persuasion knowledge is believed to concern how consumers’ deal cognitively and physically before, during and after interaction (Kirmani & Cambell, 2004).
Campbell and Kirmani (2000) offer the Process Model of Consumers’ Use of Persuasion Knowledge (Figure 10) that extends the Friestad and Wright’s (1994) Persuasion Knowledge Model. The model simply states that perceptions about an influence agent are based upon inferences of persuasion motives. These inferences are based upon the accessibility of ulterior motives (i.e. how strongly a customer interprets a sales representative’s behavior as being for personal gain rather than the customer’s best
interests) and the customer’s cognitive capacity to draw inferences. This model has the potential to benefit sellers by explaining how consumers cognitively form opinions of salespeople in the target-agent relationship (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000).

Figure 10: (2000) Process of Model of Consumers’ Use of Persuasive Knowledge

As Soldow and Thomas (1984) point out, both form and content of communication are important toward relationship building and empirical evidence indicates that a) relational communication affects behavioral outcomes b) individuals vary with respect to their facility with relational communication, and c) relational communication can be observed and measured. There are many differences in sales representative success. Based upon these models, a sales representative’s ability to appropriately understand a consumer’s needs seems to be one important variable explaining sales success. Many variables have been proposed as contributing to sales success with most explicitly or implicitly indicating the ability to understand the customer being essential to creating persuasive messages.
APPENDIX 4

Please read the following instructions to PART 1. Upon reading the instructions, please take no more than 5 minutes to respond to each question.

My interest in this questionnaire is to learn how people describe others whom they know. My concern here is with the habits, mannerisms, - in general, with the personal characteristics, rather than the physical traits – which characterize a number of different people.

In order to make sure that you are describing real people, I have set down a list of two different categories of people. In the blank space beside each category below, please write the initials, nicknames, or some other identifying symbol for a person of your acquaintance who fits into that category. Be sure to us a different person for each category.

1. A person, you know well, whom you **like**. ________________
2. A person, you know well, whom you **dislike**. ________________

Spend a few moments looking over this list, mentally comparing and contrasting the two people you have in mind for each category. Think of their habits, their beliefs, their mannerisms, their relations to others, any characteristics they have which you might use to describe them to other people. Once you have done so, continue to the next page to begin writing.
Please look back to the first sheet and place the symbol you have used to designate the person in category 1 here _________________.

Now describe this person as fully as you can. Write down as many defining characteristics as you can. Do not simply put down those characteristics that distinguish him/her from others on your list, but include any characteristics that he/she shares with others as well as characteristics that are unique to him/her. Pay particular attention to his/her habits, beliefs, ways of treating others, mannerisms, and similar attributes. Remember, describe him/her as completely as you can, so that a stranger might be able to determine the kind of person he/she is from your description. Use the back of this page if necessary. Please spend only about five (5) minutes describing him/her.

This person is:
Please look back to the first sheet and place the symbol you have used to designate the person in category 2 here ________________.

Now describe this person as fully as you can. Write down as many defining characteristics as you can. Do not simply put down those characteristics that distinguish him/her from others on your list, but include any characteristics that he/she shares with others as well as characteristics that are unique to him/her as completely as you can, so that a stranger might be able to determine the kind of person he/she is from your description. Use the back of this page if necessary. Please spend only about five (5) minutes describing him/her.

This person is:
APPENDIX 5

Person-Centered Message Scenario

Please read the following sales scenario. Based on the provided information, compose a persuasive sales email located on the following page.

You have been contacted by your best client who thinks they have a potential customer for you and Mary Kay Cosmetics. The name of this potential client is Sue Greenbucks. Sue lives in a neighboring town. She has an extensive network of contacts that may mean substantial business for you. Your client has provided you with some information about Sue and her email address. Your task is to write an email to Sue Greenbucks persuading her to become a customer of Mary Kay Cosmetics. More precisely, you are writing in hopes to persuade her to purchase products and hold a cosmetics party at her home. Please use the next page to write this email just as if it were actually going to be delivered to an actual client.

What follows is information about Sue Greenbucks; this information comes from your best client.

SUE GREENBUCKS

Sue is a wealthy, liberal Ohioan, age 50. She has extensive education and is now a business professor at Ohio State University. Prior to becoming a professor, Sue became rich when she developed and sold a popular Internet-based business. As she reinvested in stocks, she got richer and richer and is now among the three wealthiest women in Ohio.

Family background: Married once, in 1975, to Miller Greenbucks, who died in 1984. Two children: one female – Tillie, now married and living in Cincinnati; and one male – Ted, law degree from Duke University, now a junior member of the Ohio state legislature.

Professional Background: Sue started a successful catalog and online retail store while she was a single mother raising two children. She earned a doctorate in organizational psychology in 2004 and now teaches in the business department at Ohio State University “for fun”, even though she is extremely wealthy. Sue is a popular faculty member and is well liked and respected in her community.

Hobbies: 1. Running; 2. Kayaking

Belongs/supporter to the following organizations: 1. Democratic Party; 2. Greenpeace; 3. American Red Cross.

Misc. information:
1. Most admired people: Hillary Clinton, Barbara Walters, David Letterman;

3. Sue is a feminist and believes in the importance of empowering women.

4. She was heavily involved in fundraising in Ohio for Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton’s campaign for presidency.
APPENDIX 6

*Lennox Wolfe’s Revised Self-Monitoring Scale*

The following statements are about your communication behaviors. Answer each question as it relates to your general style of communication behaviors. No two statements are exactly alike, so consider each statement carefully before answering. It is important that you answer each question as frankly and honestly as you can. Your answers will be kept in the strictest confidence. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by placing the appropriate number (according to the scale below) in the space provided.

5 = Certainly, always true  
4 = Generally true  
3 = Somewhat true, with exception  
2 = Somewhat false, but with exception  
1 = Generally false  
0 = Certainly, always false

___ 1. In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behavior if I feel that something else is called for.

___ 2. I am often able to read people’s true emotions correctly through their eyes.

___ 3. I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them.

___ 4. In conversations, I am sensitive to even the slightest change in the facial expression of the person I’m conversing with.

___ 5. My powers of intuition are quite good when it comes to understanding others’ emotions and motives.

___ 6. I can usually tell when others consider a joke to be in bad taste, even though they may laugh convincingly.

___ 7. When I feel that the image I am portraying isn’t working, I can readily change it to something that does.

___ 8. I can usually tell when I’ve said something inappropriate by reading it in the listener’s eyes.
5 = Certainly, always true
4 = Generally true
3 = Somewhat true, with exception
2 = Somewhat false, but with exception
1 = Generally false
0 = Certainly, always false

___ 9. I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people in different situations.

___ 10. I have found that I can adjust my behavior to meet the requirements of any situation I find myself in.

___ 11. If someone is lying to me, I usually know it at once from that person’s manner of expression.

___ 12. Even when it might be to my advantage, I have difficulty putting up a good front.

___ 13. Once I know what the situation calls for, it’s easy for me to regulate my actions accordingly.

___ 14. I tend to show different sides of myself to different people.

___ 15. It is my feeling that if everyone else in a group is behaving a certain manner, this must be the proper way to behave.

___ 16. I actively avoid wearing clothes that are not in style.

___ 17. In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.

___ 18. At parties, I usually try to behave in a manner that makes me fit in.

___ 19. When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for cues.

___ 20. Although I know myself, I find that others do not know me.

___ 21. I try to pay attention to the reactions of others to my behavior in order to avoid being out of place.

___ 22. I find I tend to pick up slang expressions from others and use them as part of my own vocabulary.

___ 23. Different situations can make me behave like different people.

___ 24. I find that I tend to pay attention to what others are wearing.
5 = Certainly, always true
4 = Generally true
3 = Somewhat true, with exception
2 = Somewhat false, but with exception
1 = Generally false
0 = Certainly, always false

____ 25. The slightest look of disapproval in the eyes of a person with whom I am interacting is enough to make me change my approach.

____ 26. Different people tend to have different impressions about the type of person I am.

____ 27. It’s important to me to fit in with the group I’m with.

____ 28. My behavior often depends on how I feel others wish me to behave.

____ 29. I am not always the person I appear to be.

____ 30. If I am the least bit uncertain as to how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for clues.

____ 31. I usually keep up with clothing style changes by watching what others wear.

____ 32. I sometimes have the feeling that people don’t know who I really am.

____ 33. When in a social situation, I tend not to follow the crowd, but instead behave in a manner that suits my particular mood at the time.
APPENDIX 7

Organizational Role Perception

*How would you define your role as salesperson and a member of the sales team at Mary Kay?*