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## Salesperson ambidexterity and customer satisfaction: examining the role of customer demandingness, adaptive selling, and role conflict<sup>†</sup>

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This research investigates the effects of sales-service ambidexterity on salesperson role perceptions, behaviors, and customer satisfaction. Using a business-to-business, salesperson-customer sample, we build and test a model which highlights both the positive and negative consequences of this simultaneous goal pursuit. Specifically, while sales-service ambidexterity positively impacts adaptive selling behaviors, it also increases perceptions of role conflict among salespeople. Customer demandingness moderates these relationships. Taken together, the results provide insights for firms on how to manage their sales force to optimize both sales and service outcomes based on characteristics of their salespeople and customers.

**Keywords:** sales-service ambidexterity; adaptive selling behavior; role conflict; customer satisfaction; control theory; resource allocation

### Introduction

While sales productivity will always be paramount to a competitive advantage, now more than ever salespeople must also focus on service quality and effectiveness to meet increased customer demands (Bowen and Schneider 2014; Hunter and Perreault 2007). Industrial buyers, in particular, seek more than just sales from their sales representatives (Liu and Leach 2001). Therefore, to remain competitive, salespeople must provide excellent service while still reaching their sales quotas (Agnihotri et al. 2012; Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones 2007). Similarly, employees who once had to only focus on service are now either encouraged or responsible for making sales (Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012). This new paradigm has created a business-to-business (B2B) environment where the sales and service functions are practically inseparable.

Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter (2013) refer to the 'twin goals of providing quality service while achieving productivity gains by meeting increased sales targets' as sales-service ambidexterity (52). While scholars have begun to explore this construct and its implications for frontline employees (e.g. Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012; Patterson, Yu, and Kimpakorn 2014), there is still much to investigate (e.g. Sok, Sok, and De Luca 2015). Because sales and service goals can often be inherently at odds with one another, we focus on the possibility of both positive and negative effects. Building from control

theory and resource allocation logic, we develop a model that tests two main questions. First, does sales-service ambidexterity<sup>1</sup> enable salespeople to better customize and tailor their interactions to customer needs? Second, do these dual expectations yield an internal inconsistency or erratic shift of work focus? Therefore, our research examines whether ambidexterity enables one of the most prized behaviors in the salesperson's arsenal (i.e. adaptability) yet creates the opportunity for discontent with one's role (i.e. role conflict). In addition, we incorporate customer demandingness as a contingency variable (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Boles 2013; Jones et al. 2007) to help shed light onto how customer expectations shape these relationship. Customer demandingness is a critical factor in B2B sales because business customers are often dissatisfied with existing products and are searching for novel products to replace old ones (Lynch, O'Toole, and Biemans 2016). Lynch, O'Toole, and Biemans (2016) report that 82% of industrial manufacturers believe that their customers have either a 'high' or 'very high' level of customer demandingness.

By investigating these questions, we make two contributions to the literature. First, we answer the call of scholars (e.g. Kauppila, Rajala, and Jyrämä 2010; Kindström, Kowalkowski, and Alejandro 2015; O'Reilly and Battelle 2009; Sok, Sok, and De Luca 2015) to examine the potential trade-off of enacting sales-service ambidexterity. Second, our incorporation of customer demandingness as

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a moderator provides insight into whether an exacting customer environment strengthens or attenuates the relationship between ambidexterity and both the positive (adaptive selling) and negative (role conflict) outcome.

Research has shown that customer demandingness affects a salesperson's behaviors and, eventually, performance (e.g. Banin et al. 2016; Jaramillo and Mulki 2008). On the positive side, customer demandingness increases salesperson effort (Jaramillo and Mulki 2008), creativity (Wang and Netemeyer 2004), and salesperson improvisation, the capacity to respond to unexpected and urgent sales situations (Banin et al. 2016). Customer demandingness can also amplify the positive impact of customer oriented behaviors on customer value perceptions (Bharadwaj and Dong 2014). However, customer demandingness utilizes salesperson resources and can lead to higher levels of felt stress (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Boles 2013). It also reduces the positive effect of salesperson improvisation on sales performance (Banin et al. 2016). In facing customer pressure, improvisation may lead to 'haphazard actions, which might fail to meet customers' expectations and needs, and subsequently reduce sales revenue' (Banin et al. 2016, 8).

We begin by merging control theory with resource allocation logic to develop our focal construct, sales-service ambidexterity. Next we submit a comprehensive literature review of the construct to develop our conceptual model and pinpoint our contribution. We then present our hypotheses with corresponding rationale and analytic process to test them. We conclude with results and a discussion of the implications to sales literature and managerial practice.

## Theoretical background

Control Theory (Carver and Scheier 1982; Klein 1989) provides a useful framework to help understand sales-service ambidexterity because it relates to the underlying dilemma of multiple, simultaneous goal pursuit. For example, Harris, Mowen, and Brown (2005) argue that 'the influence of goal orientations on the interactions of salespeople with customers may be explained by control theory' (22). Control theory also provides logic for the resource allocation decisions which stem from this dichotomy, and therefore, it can help address our research questions involving these behaviors.

Control theory proposes that individual goals represent subjectively experienced reference points. These reference points are then compared to current levels of performance outcomes. When an individual's reference points are salient, they devote scarce resources, such as attention and time (Bergeron 2007), to secure those related outcomes. Discrepancies in reference points and performance outcomes can emerge from changes in the environment (e.g. managerial focus, customer expectations). Control theory also suggests that individuals develop and maintain

multiple goals hierarchically (Austin and Vancouver 1996). The more important the goal the more prominent its position in the hierarchy (Park and Holloway 2003). Goal orientation, or the relative importance attributed to simultaneously-held goals, creates a mental framework for how individuals allocate resources toward goals (VandeWalle et al. 1999). Thus, idiosyncratic goal hierarchies (Bagozzi and Dholakia 1999) impact the resources individuals expend, particularly when those goals are in opposition with one another. Ultimately, an employee's time, attention, and other resources are limited. Devoting resources to the fulfillment of one goal comes at the expense of another (Bergeron 2007; Rapp et al. 2013).

## Sales-service ambidexterity

Building from Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter (2013), the sales and marketing literature defines ambidexterity as an employee's ability to achieve or accomplish seemingly conflicting tasks and goals simultaneously (Sok, Sok, and De Luca 2015). Ambidexterity manifests in an employee's ability to manage these often incompatible tasks and achieve dual performance outcomes (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004). For instance, sales growth can be attained by selling higher volumes to existing accounts or by prospecting to new customers. During service encounters that involve a 'conversation with customers', salespeople also choose between putting forth greater effort on *customer service provision* or placing more energy into *cross/up selling* (Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012, 34). Moreover, as shown in Table 1, ambidexterity can occur at different stages of the sales process.

Ambidexterity has been viewed as an orientation that motivates a set of customer service behaviors as well as a set of cross/up-selling behaviors (Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012; Sok, Sok, and De Luca 2015; Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter 2013). Customer service encompasses activities like identifying customer problems and providing a solution to customer complaints. Cross-/up selling requires employees to leverage existing relationships to sell customers a new offering that may or may not be related to the initial product (Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012). In this study, we specifically adopt this interpretation of ambidexterity as the salesperson's 'engagement in both customer service provision and cross-/up-selling during service encounters' (22).

While sales-service ambidexterity can have a positive impact on behavioral and performance outcomes (e.g. Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012; Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter 2015), an underlying premise of this research is that it can also prove to be detrimental (Aksin and Harker 1999; DeCarlo and Lam 2015). Employing control theory, we suggest that these negative effects may be caused by the underlying tension between disparate sales-service tasks. Our conceptual model tests this

Table 1. Review of sales-service ambidexterity conceptualization.

Author(s)	Sales-Service Ambidexterity (SA)		
	Definition	Measurement	Key findings
DeCarlo and Lam (2015)	Engagement in both 'hunting' and 'farming' behaviors in customer retention and acquisition	SA is composed of both hunting (e.g. 'the most enjoyable part of the job is selling to a new account') and farming (e.g. 'the most gratifying is working with an established customer') behaviors	The effect of SA on profit margins is contingent on a salesperson's level of customer orientation. The hunting and farming aspects of SA are driven by promotion and prevention focus valances. The model is tested with responses from 357 B2B salespeople
Sok, Sok, and De Luca (2015)	Simultaneous engagement on cross-up selling and customer service provision	SA is measured with a multiplicative term derived from cross-up selling and customer service provision scales developed by Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter (2012)	SA is preceded by 'can do' (locomotion and assessment orientation) and 'reason to' (enjoyment of work and driven to work) motivators and their interactions. The model is tested with responses from 247 pharma reps
van der Borgh, de Jong, and Nijssen (2015)	'The degree to which sales managers synergize the pursuit of multiple product-selling goals when guiding their subordinates' (p. 4)	Multiplicative measure involving new product and existing product sales	A sales manager's ambidextrous orientation has a positive effect on new and existing product sales. A model is tested with responses from 154 salespeople from a communication technology company in Europe
Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter (2015)	'Simultaneous pursuit of service and sales objectives by service firms' (p. 493)	SA is measured with a multiplicative term derived from service (e.g. improving reliability of services) and sales components (e.g. creating new ways to expand client portfolios)	SA is preceded by both branch context (e.g. social support) and employee characteristics (e.g. learning orientation and self-efficacy). SA has a positive impact on both customer satisfaction and financial performance. The conceptual model is tested with survey responses from 2306 retail bank employees
Patterson, Yu, and Kimpakorn (2014)	'Strategic effort to pursue service and sales goals simultaneously' (p. 1946)	SA is measured using a service-sales climate scale which incorporates both service and sales components	SA has a positive effect on sales-service performance – an index of supervisor-rated service and sales performance of frontline employees. The model is tested with cross-sectional survey, conducted in Thailand, with responses from 212 frontline employees working in service sector
van der Borgh and Schepers (2014)	'[Focus on] bridging the potentially contradicting activities of new and existing product selling' (p. 713)	SA is assessed with a multiplicative measure of new and existing product-selling orientations	SA has a positive effect on task autonomy and eventually performance in selling new and existing products. The model was tested with data derived from 104 salespeople in consumer electronics retailing

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Author(s)	Sales-Service Ambidexterity (SA)		Key findings
	Definition	Measurement	
Rapp et al. (2013)	‘Service ambidexterity refers to the ability to deliver high quality service while proactively seeking ways to improve service’ (p. 548)	Service ambidexterity measure consisted of a four item scale adapted from Yu, Patterson, and Ruyter (2010)	Service ambidexterity strengthens the social media usage linkage across channel levels. The model was tested using data collected from 28 supplier salespeople, 144 retail store managers (outlet), and 445 retailer customers in B2B sporting goods context
Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter (2012)	‘Engagement in both customer service provision and cross-up-selling during service encounters’ (p. 22)	SA is measured with a multiplicative term derived from cross-up selling and customer service provision scales	SA is driven the interaction between a locomotion and assessment orientation. SA is positively related to customer satisfaction and sales performance but negatively related to efficiency. The conceptual model is tested with survey responses from 119 employees working at a call center
Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter (2013)	‘Simultaneous pursuit of dual, sometimes seemingly conflicting strategic goals’ (p. 52)	SA is measured with a multiplicative term derived from service (e.g. improving reliability of services) and sales components (e.g. creating new ways to expand client portfolios)	SA is predicted by branch level (e.g. transformational leadership) and employee level (e.g. empowerment) variables. SA is positively related to financial performance. The model is tested with survey responses from 2306 retail bank employees

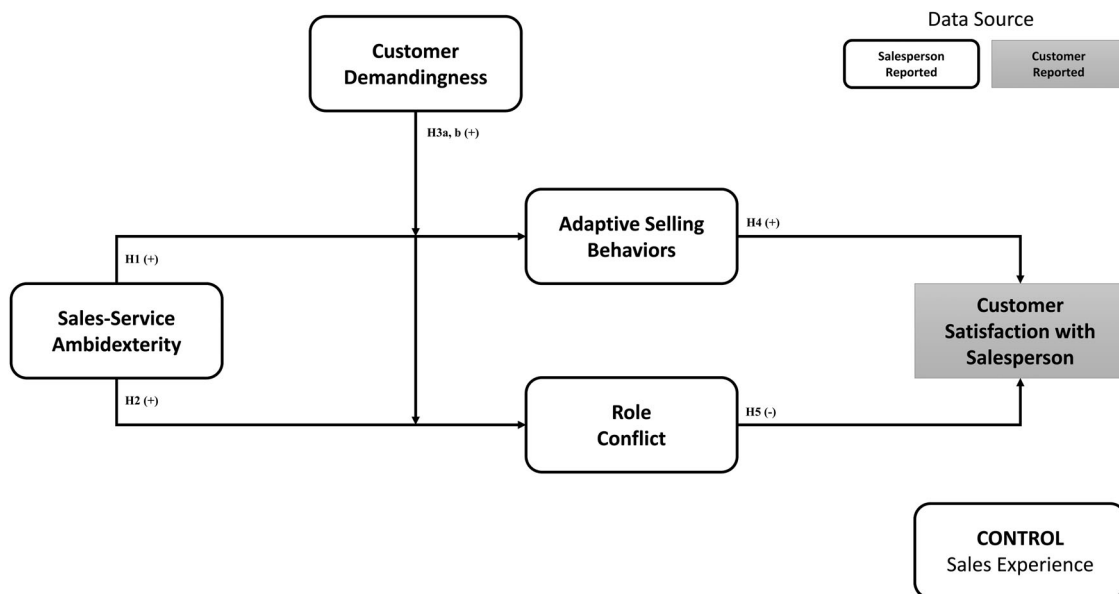


Figure 1. Hypothesized model.

theoretical perspective. Specifically, we examine the effects of ambidexterity on a salesperson’s adaptive selling ability as well as job-related role conflict. In

addition, we model customer demandingness as a boundary condition to these relationships. Finally, we include customer satisfaction with the salesperson to determine

how these positive and negative aspects of ambidexterity ultimately translate to a critical performance outcome (Figure 1).

## Model development

### *Sales-service ambidexterity and adaptive selling behavior*

Adaptive selling refers to the alteration of selling behaviors to fit customers' needs and expectations (Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986). At its most basic level, adapting to the sales situation involves the prioritization of one goal over another – be it satisfying an upset customer, changing focus to convert a sale, etc. When salespeople adapt their strategy, they shift their internal goal hierarchy (Park and Holloway 2003) to make one goal more salient than another.

Ambidexterity has been associated with variety-increasing learning and a desire to refine and acquire new KSAs, or knowledge, skills, and abilities (Mom et al. 2009). Salespeople who enjoy learning are likely to try new approaches to help deal with challenges of the job (Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar 1994). Goad and Jaramillo's (2014) meta-analysis demonstrates that salesperson's learning orientation is one of the strongest predictors of adaptive selling. Hence, it seems reasonable to suggest that the ambidextrous employees' inclination for learning and engaging in 'both routine and nonroutine activities' (Mom et al. 2009, 813) may also help them engage in adaptive selling behaviors.

Ambidexterity also requires employees to simultaneously perform customer service and cross-/up-selling activities, or if needed, swiftly switch between the two activities (Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012). We suggest this multiplicity of behaviors is bound to impact adaptability. The salesperson that can move seamlessly between sales and service behaviors will possess an arsenal of KSAs which should make that salesperson better at altering or customizing the solution (Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar 1994). One contribution of this manuscript is to empirically test this assertion, made formally by Cron et al. (2005): 'in all likelihood, ambidexterity enhances adaptability and, more broadly, practical intelligence' (128).

We predict this relationship will emerge in our model for several reasons. Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004) suggest that ambidextrous salespeople are more willing take actions involving 'adaptation to new opportunities' of an overall business strategy (50). An ambidextrous orientation will also drive a salesperson to achieve previously set goals (Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter 2013). Aligning with the current study, ambidexterity should lead salespeople to increase adaptive selling behaviors in order to achieve the associated sales-service goals. Formally,

H1: Sales-service ambidexterity will have a positive effect on adaptive selling behavior.

### *Sales-service ambidexterity and role conflict*

Role conflict refers to the competing demands of different roles assigned to an individual (Kahn et al. 1964). We employ the tenets of control theory (Carver and Scheier 1982; Klein 1989) – namely goal orientation and resource allocation – to argue that sales-service ambidexterity will positively impact role conflict. These salespeople feel the pressure of a duality of expectations. Specifically, the ambidextrous salesperson must navigate both sides of the marketing exchange (i.e. revenue generation and service quality), and the corresponding objectives may seem incongruent. We argue that this perception of incongruity may cause the salesperson to experience role conflict.

Role conflict can also occur 'when a salesperson believes that the expectations and demands of two or more members of his or her role set (e.g. boss and customer) are incompatible' (Singh 1998, 70). These opposing requests are an often cited role stressor in the sales literature (e.g. Babakus et al. 1999). In sales, serving multiple masters 'comes with the job' as many demands from managers and customers are irreconcilable. For example, managers may want the salesperson to increase sales margins while customers want better service (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Boles 2011). During a customer service encounter, salespeople will likely face the dilemma of allocating more of their time to either cross/up selling (i.e. satisfying the supervisor) or offering greater service (i.e. satisfying the customer). From a resource allocation perspective, these goals are in opposition to one another, and it forces salespeople to make decisions as to which goals are more important (Park and Holloway 2003). These seemingly incompatible goals and resources will likely lead to higher levels of role conflict.

The inclusion of both sales and service responsibilities is generally perceived by salespeople as a widening of one's job scope (Evans, Arnold, and Grant 1999). An expansion of job scope is said to increase perceived job complexity (Coelho, Augusto, and Lages 2011). This expanded job scope leads to role conflict in the service industry (e.g. Luria, Yagil, and Gal 2014), and we predict the same relationship among frontline employees. Ambidexterity places conflicting demands on resources, and in order to achieve their sales and service goals, salespeople will need to consistently make trade-offs in how they allocate those resources (Aksin and Harker 1999; Evans, Arnold, and Grant 1999; Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004). In light of such job demands, salespeople are likely to demonstrate attitudinal and psychological challenges (Fox, Dwyer, and Ganster 1993), which would enhance their perception of role conflict. In summary, we argue that salespeople who attempt to simultaneously enact

both service provision and cross/up selling are more likely to experience higher levels of role conflict. Thus:

H2: Sales-service ambidexterity will have a positive effect on role conflict.

### ***Moderating role of customer demandingness***

Over the last decade, customers have begun to demand more from companies and salespeople (Banin et al. 2016). These demands require salespeople to add a whole new set of problem-solving and value-providing KSAs to their traditional portfolio (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Boles 2013). We argue that customer demandingness will possess a positive moderating effect on the relationship between salesperson ambidexterity and adaptive selling. Ambidextrous salespeople welcome change and new experiences (Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012). When facing demanding situations, ambidextrous salespeople are eager to act and get the job done. They thrive in high-paced, dynamic situations where the organization quickly changes to the environment (Birkinshaw and Gibson 2004). Such employees are multitaskers with a high level of initiative and are capable of acting spontaneously without seeking support from management (Birkinshaw and Gibson 2004).

Ambidextrous individuals also possess the capacity to respond to dynamic contexts by effectively managing their *exploration* and *exploitation* responses (Good and Mitchel 2013). Individual exploration involves ‘searching for novelty’ and creativity in the organizational context while individual exploitation is the capacity to focus attention on relevant stimuli and the task at hand (Good and Mitchel 2013, 438). These characteristics should help ambidextrous salespeople effectively meet the challenges of customers with multiple expectations (Wang and Netemeyer 2002). Recent studies show that ambidextrous salespeople possess a *can do* mentality (Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter 2015) that motivates them to achieve sales goals while serving the customer (Jaramillo and Mulki 2008; Sok, Sok, and De Luca 2015). When facing demanding customers, ambidextrous salespeople would be more likely to respond with adaptive selling behaviors which are conducive to meeting the complementary objectives of achieving higher sales (Franke and Park 2006) and satisfying the customer (Román and Martín 2014). We hypothesize formally:

H3a: Customer demandingness will strengthen the positive relationship between salesperson ambidexterity and adaptive selling behavior.

We also suggest that customer demandingness will have a positive moderating effect on the relationship between salesperson ambidexterity and role conflict. In serving demanding customers, salespeople put forth a greater amount of effort, effectively working harder and smarter

(Jaramillo and Mulki 2008). Banin et al. (2016) posit that customer demandingness motivates salespeople to ‘go the extra mile’ and engage in improvisational behaviors to address complex customer problems. Selling to demanding customers often requires greater coordination of effort and adaptation of standardized procedures and processes (Schmitz and Ganesan 2014). However, the increased effort and workload from high-customer demands will likely result in perceptions of ‘excessive pressure’ (Banin et al. 2016, 4), increased role conflict and role ambiguity (Schmitz and Ganesan 2014), and feelings of being stressed out (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Boles 2013).

Increased customer complexity also augments the cognitive and role demands of the sales job (Johnson and Sohi 2014; Schmitz and Ganesan 2014). In facing these challenges, salespeople must manage their internal resources. Building from control theory, salespeople prioritize their goals in a hierarchy (Park and Holloway 2003), and then make decision on how to allocate them (VandeWalle et al. 1999). A demanding customer requires additional resources, perhaps drawing from resources the salesperson wished to devote elsewhere, thus undermining the effectiveness of salesperson actions. Banin et al. (2016) recently showed that the efficacy of salesperson behaviors, like improvisation, in generating higher sales is significantly reduced in cases where the salesperson serves highly demanding customers. Logically, this will create friction as salespeople reconfigure their resource priorities. Consequently, under these demanding conditions, salespeople could perceived that the goals of achieving sales objectives and providing exceptional customer service are in conflict:

H3b: Customer demandingness will further strengthen the positive relationship between salesperson ambidexterity and role conflict.

### ***Customer satisfaction with the salesperson***

In this study, we integrate the customer’s satisfaction with the salesperson construct. Our approach aims to fill a narrow yet distinct gap in the sales literature. Literature suggests that salesperson-related variables affect customer satisfaction (e.g. Bradford, Crant, and Phillips 2009; Homburg and Stock 2005; Oliver and Swan 1989); however, few studies have actually tested the effect of key variables, such as adaptive selling, on overall customer satisfaction (Román and Iacobucci 2010; Román and Martín 2014). Perhaps, the lack of investigation is due to the scope of customer satisfaction measures. These measures range from satisfaction with products, product-related information, handling, technical services, internal personnel, complaint handling, and satisfaction with the salesperson (e.g. Homburg and Rudolph 2001). We include customer satisfaction with the salesperson because it is the not as open to influence by other factors.

Scholars have approached the customer satisfaction with the salesperson construct from an interaction-experience perspective (e.g. Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990; Román and Iacobucci 2010) or a working-relationship perspective (e.g. Rapp et al. 2006). Examinations within a B2B context have used the working-relationship perspective (Agnihotri, Rapp, and Trainor 2009; Agnihotri et al. 2016). In this research, customer satisfaction with the salesperson is defined as the overall attitude that results from the confirmation of customer expectations related to the productive outcomes experienced when dealing with the salesperson (Rapp et al. 2006).

Recent studies support the positive effect that adaptive selling can have on different dimensions of customer satisfaction, such as satisfaction with suppliers (Román and Martín 2014) and satisfaction with the service/product (Ahearne, Mathieu, and Rapp 2005; Román and Iacobucci 2010). Adaptive selling can also enhance the salesperson's ability to build quality relationships with buyers (Jaramillo et al. 2007; Speakman and Ryals 2012). Adaptive selling helps salespeople alter their sales presentations and communication styles, based on their categorization of customers and their specific expectations (Grewal and Sharma 1991; Román and Iacobucci 2010). We suggest that salespeople who implement adaptive selling behaviors are more likely to understand the customer's perspective (Román and Iacobucci 2010). This is because they are better able to listen to diverse customer needs and respond with customized solutions to address customer problems (Chen and Jaramillo 2014). Hence, we hypothesize the following:

H4: Adaptive selling behavior will have a positive effect on customer satisfaction with the salesperson.

Next, we evaluate the effect of role conflict, as perceived by salespeople, on customer satisfaction with the salesperson. Prior research suggests that organizational characteristics and contextual features perceived by employees play a key role in predicting customer satisfaction (Bradford, Crant, and Phillips 2009; Dormann and Kaiser 2002; Homburg and Stock 2005; Schmit and Allscheid 1995).

In general, higher levels of job demands, workload, and job stress were found to negatively affect performance in service settings and have negative effects on customer satisfaction (e.g. Reilly et al. 2014). For instance, role conflict of health care service employees was found to decrease client satisfaction (Jimmieson and Griffin 1998). From a control theory perspective, salespeople who pursue multiple goals are forced to make decisions about which goals deserve the greatest amount of their time and effort (Bergeron 2007). Due to the limited amount of resources, certain goals will be prioritized over others (Schmidt and Dolis 2009).

In our study, we predict that when salespeople experience role conflict, they will manage the situation by prioritizing the goal that benefits them the most at the expense of

the goals that do not. This, in turn, may negatively affect the salesperson's customer-oriented behaviors and reduce the customer's satisfaction with the salesperson (Betten-court and Brown 2003; Flaherty, Dahlstrom, and Skinner 1999). Thus, we hypothesize that these salespeople will prioritize achieving higher sales volume, which can lead to personal benefits (e.g. commission, bonuses, etc.) over satisfying customers, which does not translate to personal rewards. Our approach aligns with the theoretical logic suggesting that in the presence of role stressors, some employees seek to 'alter' the situation that is causing the stress (Goolsby 1992, 158). In the current context, we predict that salespeople who put forth more effort to sales goals will garner lower customer satisfaction.

H5: Role conflict will have a negative effect on customer satisfaction with the salesperson.

## Methodology

### Sample

We employed an international market research company to collect dyadic data (salespeople and their customers) across a wide range of B2B companies and industries. Recent studies involving salesperson ambidexterity have utilized a B2B setting (e.g. O'Cass, Heirati, and Ngo 2014; Sok, Sok, and De Luca 2015). We adhere to this protocol because this environment requires a sales force to maintain an equal emphasis on sales and service to remain competitive (Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones 2007; Ulaga and Loveland 2014). Both surveys were pre-tested with their respective groups (i.e. salespeople or customers), and feedback was incorporated into the final survey through minor adjustments.

The sample of sales professionals was randomly chosen from a group of targeted companies (Appendix A). Each salesperson provided a list of his/her customers, from which we randomly selected one name and invited his or her participation. The customers were asked to report their satisfaction with the salesperson. The invitation also explained that the data would not be used to evaluate the salesperson, which should reduce social desirability bias. Code numbers were assigned to each salesperson, which were then used to match salesperson and customers' responses while enabling accuracy and anonymity. The dyadic data approach also provides an opportunity to reduce common method bias (Doty and Glick 1998; Podsakoff et al. 2003; Rindfleisch et al. 2008). In total, we received 219 salesperson responses and 162 customer responses, thus the final sample consisted of 162 matched salesperson-customer dyads.

### Measures

All constructs were adapted from the literature and measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from '1 =



Table 2. Correlations and descriptive statistics.

	Mean	STD	CUP	CSP	RC	ASB	CD	CSS	EXP
Cross-/up Selling (CU)	5.9	1.1	.86						
Customer Service Provision (CSP)	6.2	0.6	.16*	.71					
Role Conflict (RC)	5.2	1.5	.09	-.27*	.85				
Adaptive Selling Behavior (ASB)	5.7	1.1	.27**	-.01	.47**	.81			
Customer Demandingness (CD)	6.0	1.2	.26**	.38**	-.24*	-.05	.88		
Customer Satisfaction with Salesperson (CSS)	5.8	1.2	-.01	.08	-.19*	-.01	.12	.77	
Sales Experience (EXP)	6.0	3.8	.05	.01	-.05	.06	-.03	-.02	–

Note: Significance level: (\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ). STD = standard deviation. Diagonal elements are square root of AVE.

Strongly Disagree' to '7 = Strongly Agree'. The measure for adaptive selling behavior was adapted from Spiro and Weitz (1990). This three-item scale (CR = .85  $\alpha$  = .76 AVE = .66) captured salesperson's adaptive behaviors when dealing with customers (e.g. *When I feel that my sales approach is not working, I can easily change to another approach.*). Role conflict was measured using a three-item scale (CR = .89  $\alpha$  = .81 AVE = .73) (e.g. *I receive incompatible requests from two or more groups of people*) adapted from Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). The outcome variable, customer satisfaction with the salesperson (e.g. *Overall, I feel that my relationship with this rep is productive*) was reported by customers. A three-item scale (CR = .82  $\alpha$  = .68 AVE = .60) was adapted from Rapp et al. (2006). Customer demandingness (CR = .92  $\alpha$  = .87 AVE = .79) was measured using three items (e.g. *My clients require a perfect fit between their needs and our product/service offering*) from Wang and Netemeyer's (2002) scale. To capture sales-service ambidexterity, we adapted both the customer service provision (CR = .80  $\alpha$  = .67 AVE = .51) (e.g. *I usually provide solution to customers' concerns related to products they currently own*) and cross-/up selling scales (CR = .90  $\alpha$  = .83 AVE = .74) (e.g. *I usually ask questions to assess whether the customers would be willing to buy additional products/services*) developed by Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter (2012). Following the literature, we calculated the interactive effect of customer service provision and cross-/up selling. This calculation was done using the product-indicator approach in SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle, Wende, and Will 2005), which creates an interaction construct by multiplying all possible pairs of both scales (Chin, Marcolin, and Newsted 2003). Finally, since previous studies demonstrate effects of the salesperson's experience (e.g. Churchill et al. 1985; Yilmaz and Hunt 2001), we control for this variable in our model. See Appendix B for an overview of the measures utilized in the study.

### Analysis

We estimated the hypothesized relationships using SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle, Wende, and Will 2005). Partial least square (PLS) analysis is particularly appropriate

when studying complex models with small sample sizes (Chin, Marcolin, and Newsted 2003; Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2011; Marcoulides and Saunders 2006). Further, given our goal of capturing the interactive effects of customer service provision and cross-/up selling, the product-indicator approach within PLS, which multiplies all possible pairs of indicators from both the moderator and predictor constructs to create interaction terms (Chin, Marcolin, and Newsted 2003), seems a reasonable choice. Moreover, testing interactions in PLS does not inflate measurement error (Chin, Marcolin, and Newsted 2003). The latent variable scores of the two-way interaction between customer service provision and cross-/up selling were calculated, extracted, and then used to manually create the 3-way interactions. Following common conventions, we utilized the two-step approach (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). Table 2 provides correlation matrix and descriptive statistics.

We assessed the reliability and validity of each of the measures by calculating composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Composite reliabilities of all constructs exceeded the .70 cutoff, providing evidence of reliability (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Convergent reliability was assessed by examining both the values of the AVE as well as the items' loadings on their associated constructs. All AVE values exceeded the .50 cutoff, thus satisfying convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981; Vinzi et al. 2010). Further, we utilized the bootstrap procedure to measure the  $t$ -values and significance levels of the item loadings (Chin 1998). All items loaded on their respective constructs with a value of at least .65 (Vinzi et al. 2010). Moreover, no items cross-loaded significantly on other constructs (Gefen and Straub 2005). Discriminant validity was achieved using by using a procedure by Fornell and Larcker (1981) where the squared root of the AVE for each construct exceeded correlation between any two constructs in the model case.

The model demonstrated adequate fit with a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) of .07 (Hu and Bentler 1999). We also utilized the goodness-of-fit (GoF) index that acts as a global fit criterion for validating PLS analyzed models. The model's (GoF) index is equal to .40 greater than the  $GoF_{large}$ .36 cutoff, which provides

additional validation of our global fit (Tenenhaus et al. 2005; Wetzels, Odekerken-Schröder, and Van Oppen 2009). In sum, our findings show evidence of reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity.

## Results

To test the hypothesized relationships, we first analyzed a direct effects model before adding the interaction effects of customer demandingness. Table 3 provides summary of the results.

The final results show support for H<sub>1</sub> as there is a positive relationship between sales-service ambidexterity and adaptive selling behavior ( $\beta = .43, p < .01$ ). Likewise, the positive relationship between sales-service ambidexterity and role conflict ( $\beta = .38, p < .01$ ) lends support for H<sub>2</sub>. However, the relationship between adaptive selling and customer satisfaction with the salesperson was not significant, not supporting H<sub>4</sub>. The negative relationship between role conflict and customer satisfaction with the salesperson was statistically significant ( $\beta = -.30, p < .01$ ), supporting H<sub>5</sub>. Additionally, we uncovered a positive relationship (non-hypothesized) between ambidexterity and customer satisfaction ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ) replicating previous research (Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012; Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter 2015).

We examined the effect of moderator, customer demandingness, on the relationships between both ambidexterity and adaptive selling as well as ambidexterity and role conflict. The findings show that customer demandingness interacts with sales-service ambidexterity

to positively impact adaptive selling behavior ( $\beta = .23, p < .01$ ), and role conflict ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ), supporting H<sub>3a</sub> and H<sub>3b</sub>.

Additional analysis was conducted to test the effect sizes of both interactions,  $f^2$ , as suggested in the literature (Cohen 1988). Specifically, we compared the change in the proportion of variance explained ( $R^2$ ) for both the adaptive selling behavior and role conflict constructs in the direct effects model with that of the moderated model. The effect size  $f^2$  is equal to .11 for adaptive selling behavior and .12 for role conflict. These moderate  $f^2$  effect sizes provide additional evidence of the significant interactive effects of customer demandingness and sales-service ambidexterity (Chin, Marcolin, and Newsted 2003).

## Discussion

Because firms must balance revenue generation with customer retention, salespeople are expected to maintain multiple goals and behaviors, namely sales generation and service provision. Recent research has observed the changing roles in the sales function (e.g. Geiger et al. 2009; Jong, Verbeke, and Nijssen 2014; Ulaga and Loveland 2014). As such, our research examines how sales-service ambidexterity can address this new business landscape. We apply control theory and resource allocation logic to examine the possible friction stemming from sales-service ambidexterity. We model and test customer-salesperson dyadic data to offer an empirical examination of how this friction manifests through both positive and negative outcomes. In this final section, we discuss the

Table 3. Results.

Hypothesized links	Std. coefficients ( <i>t</i> -values)	Hypothesis	Result
H1: Ambidexterity → Adaptive Selling Behavior	.43** (4.88)	(+)	Supported
H2: Ambidexterity → Role Conflict	.38** (6.17)	(+)	Supported
H3a: Ambidexterity * Customer Demandingness → Adaptive Selling Behavior	.23** (2.98)	(+)	Supported
H3b: Ambidexterity * Customer Demandingness → Role Conflict	.20** (3.19)	(+)	Supported
H4: Adaptive Selling Behavior → Customer Satisfaction with Salesperson	ns	(+)	Not Supported
H5: Role Conflict → Customer Satisfaction with Salesperson	-.30** (3.24)	(-)	Supported
Non-hypothesized links			
Cross-/up Selling → Adaptive Selling Behavior	.35** (4.24)		
Cross-/up Selling → Role Conflict	.26* (2.5)		
Customer Service Provision → Adaptive Selling Behavior	Ns		
Customer Service Provision → Role Conflict	-.19* (2.04)		
Customer Demandingness → Adaptive Selling Behavior	ns		
Customer Demandingness → Role Conflict	-.22* (2.25)		
Ambidexterity → Customer Satisfaction with Salesperson	.21* (2.02)		
Ambidexterity * Customer Demandingness → Customer Satisfaction with Salesperson	-.17* (1.96)		
CONTROL			
Experience → Customer Satisfaction with Salesperson	ns		

Note: Significance level: (\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ); ns = Not significant.

implications for theory as well as practical insights for managers debating the value of ambidexterity versus the alternative of separate sales and service specialists. We also outline the study's limitations and directions for the future research.

### *Theoretical implications*

Our research makes a number of theoretical contributions. First, we answer and move forward on the call of Sok, Sok, and De Luca (2015) to explore salesperson ambidexterity. Our research examines how the simultaneous pursuit of sales and service provision impacts the desired outcome of adaptability and the non-desired outcome of role conflict. Our results demonstrate that as demands for sales-service ambidexterity grow, salespeople may increasingly adapt to the situation. At the same time, as salespeople become increasingly responsible for integrating both sales generation and service provision, they may perceive a heightened level of discord in their role (i.e. role conflict). Our results contribute by demonstrating that the dual responsibilities of sales and service may result in outcomes that are neither singularly positive nor negative. Further, we submit control theory to understand the underlying rationale for the dual outcomes emanating from the salesperson's level of ambidexterity. The theoretical framework highlights the means by which individuals allocate resources toward multiple, simultaneously-held goals (VandeWalle et al. 1999), as well as the downside of such a resource allocation.

Second, we examine the situational conditions in which the salesperson is immersed. Given the increasing expectations of customers (e.g. Li and Calantone 1998; Wang and Netemeyer 2002), we assess how customer demandingness moderates the relationship between sales-service ambidexterity and adaptiveness and the relationship between sales-service ambidexterity and role conflict. We find that customer demandingness enhances both relationships, which has intriguing implications. Customer demandingness may increase the salespersons' focus on sales and service provision thereby ensuring greater effort is exerted toward their sales adaptiveness. At the same time, the salesperson may feel conflicted due to the level of resources demanded by one's customer base and the commensurate opportunity costs resulting from allocating more resources to sales ambidexterity, thereby heightening role conflict. In this vein, our results suggest a fruitful research path for scholars. Future studies could focus on moderating effects, such as the various environments, climates, or cultures that may enhance the ambidexterity-to-adaptiveness relationship while reducing the ambidexterity-to-role conflict relationship.

Third, Yu, Patterson, and de Ruyter (2015) noted that the opposing demands from sales-service ambidexterity may create role ambiguity. Our research extends this

premise and empirically demonstrates its impact on role conflict and the downstream effects of this variable. The integration of role conflict into the model provides unique insight into the chain-of-effects leading from sales-service ambidexterity and the outcome of customer satisfaction. As a salesperson's ambidexterity increases, s/he increasingly experiences role conflict because of these clashing – if even self-imposed – demands, which ultimately reduces customer satisfaction. As a result, the salesperson redeploys resources toward reconciling these demands rather than focusing on behaviors that satisfy customers. By incorporating dual pathways from salesperson ambidexterity, we highlight the potential for adverse effects that impact the firm.

### *Managerial implications*

Organizations are striving to implement overarching corporate strategies that focus on both service provision and sales generation. Firms that demand that their salesforce excels in both sales and service may find a series of positive and/or unexpected outcomes (Mittal et al. 2005). For instance, in our research salesperson ambidexterity impacted both adaptiveness and role conflict. Thus, the adoption and organization-wide embrace of ambidexterity warrants careful consideration. We would submit that firms must articulate the role of the salesforce. Will it be tasked with role specialization or role ambidexterity? For instance, in some firms, salespeople are grouped according to specific sales goals. In this environment, certain groups of salespeople focus on: (a) business generation and new account development; (b) revenue expansion of existing accounts; and (c) service provision. In this structure, specialization is considered a means to develop expertise and greater productivity in a pre-defined role. Whereas, in an ambidextrous role, salespeople are expected to develop both expertise in revenue generation and sales provision. The key for managers is to understand their firm's strategic objectives and how best to structure their salesforce to reach these objectives.

Second, if the firm requires ambidexterity from its salesforce, this undoubtedly entails a rearrangement of employee priorities and resources (Piercy 2010), as well as the acquisition of additional competences among salespeople (Kindström, Kowalkowski, and Alejandro 2015). Hence, organizations expecting greater ambidexterity from their salesforce should proactively consider the investment required for training their sales teams while acclimatizing their managers to the shift in strategic focus (Kauppila, Rajala, and Jyrämä 2010).

Third, the relationship between salesperson ambidexterity and role conflict should be highlighted. The downstream effects of role conflict on customer service are important to managers. Customer service has cascading effects on a range of critical outcomes, including loyalty, word-of-mouth, and

profitability (e.g. Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann 2011). Hence, increasing expectations of ambidexterity placed on the salesforce may impose a physical and psychological toll on employees, which eventually manifests itself with negative performance effects (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004; Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012). Thus, the sales manager needs to understand how to equip his/her salesforce to meet the resource demands required by ambidexterity. The properly equipped salesperson may be more able to effectively manage his or her resources to meet the demands inherently required of ambidexterity.

Fourth, managers should be mindful of the market environment in which their salesforce operates. Our results demonstrated that customer demandingness heightened the relationship between salesperson ambidexterity and both adaptiveness and role conflict. The customers who possess greater expectations from their ambidextrous salesperson actually facilitate higher levels of adaptive selling techniques. Alternatively, the more demanding the customers are, the greater the role conflict experienced by the ambidextrous salesperson. With this knowledge, managers could proactively work with their ambidextrous salesforce to mitigate role conflict. Perhaps, managers could leverage their Customer Relationship Management technology as an early warning system to assist their salesforce. For instance, when the sales manager becomes aware that a salesperson is serving a customer or group of customers with increasing demands, the manager could either: (a) provide the salesperson with pro-active support to reduce role conflict or, (b) potentially transition the customer to a salesperson who better handles role conflict. By reducing the opportunity for role conflict, the manager would effectively be increasing the potential for customer satisfaction with his/her salesforce.

### Limitations and future research

While our study extends the discussion about sales-service ambidexterity and adaptive selling, the impact of salesperson ambidexterity warrants further investigation. A range of employee effectiveness variables may have an indirect impact on more tangible firm outcomes. For instance, future research could examine whether salesperson ambidexterity impacts turnover intentions, job satisfaction (Sok, Sok, and De Luca 2015), or role overload. In a similar manner, the impact of salesperson ambidexterity on other valued outcomes is needed.

Second, our research highlights the need to understand the means by which sales-service ambidexterity is developed. Undoubtedly, a well-cultivated ambidextrous salesforce would serve as a valued asset for the firm. Future research could uncover specific traits or organizational contexts (e.g. customer, salesperson, organization, environment, etc.) that enable salesperson ambidexterity. In a related vein, scholars could focus on profiling the

ambidextrous frontline employee and then providing guidance on optimizing that profile.

Third, the current manuscript joins a growing stream of literature which points to both positive and negative effects associated with sales-service ambidexterity. Future research may uncover optimal levels of sales and service behaviors.

Finally, scholars would benefit from a longitudinal study involving how role conflict and adaptive selling change over time. While our analysis provides evidence of how competing sales and service goals influence these variables, salespeople change their focus over time, particularly as managers motivate and prioritize different goals. Therefore, it would benefit theory and practice to have an expanded view of ambidexterity strategy and its impact over longer sales cycles. Scholars are still creating and adapting ways to operationalize sales-service ambidexterity. We combine customer service provision with cross-up/selling and garner valid and useful results. But this area is ripe for exploration and full scale development. Creating such a multi-dimensional construct may be the most logical and critical next step to the advancement of this research.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Note

1. A review of the literature (Table 1) reveals different approaches to theorize and measure ambidexterity. In the current study, the terms 'salesperson ambidexterity' and 'sales-service ambidexterity' indicate the salesperson's ambidextrous behavior involving cross-up selling and service provision (Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter 2012). This approach aligns with the literature where salesperson characteristics have been measured by capturing the actual behaviors that are reflective of those abilities (e.g. Ahearne et al. 2008; Brady and Cronin 2001).

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**Appendix A. Salespeople sample characteristics**

<i>Industries (%)</i>	
Automobile	13.5
Beauty and cosmetics	1.8
Financial	21.6
Fast moving consumer goods	8.0
Healthcare	10.5
Pharmaceutical	21
Marketing	3.7
Engineering and construction	2.4
Information technology	2.4
Basic materials	4.9
Hospitality	1.2
Other	9.0
<i>Gender (%)</i>	
Female	12.3
Male	87.7
<i>Marital status (%)</i>	
Single	21
Married	79
<i>Education level (%)</i>	
Undergraduate or above	91%
Total number of salespeople	162

**Appendix B. Measurement items, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha & average variance extracted**

Measurement items	Factor loadings
Customer Service Provision CR = .80 $\alpha$ = .67 AVE = .51	
I usually try to calm complaining customers, so that we can jointly handle their complaints about their products/services	.68
I usually provide solution to customers' concerns related to products they currently own	.71
Having identified the customers' problem with their products/services, I solve it in a reliable way	.80
I usually listen attentively to customers to handle their concerns regarding their products/services	.65
Cross-/up Selling CR = .90 $\alpha$ = .83 AVE = .74	
I usually ask questions to assess whether the customers would be willing to buy additional products/services	.83
I hardly neglect a good opportunity to advice customers of product which they could benefit from	.87
I usually offer an additional product/service which meets the customers' needs best	.89
Adaptive Selling Behavior CR = .85 $\alpha$ = .76 AVE = .66	
Each customer requires a unique approach.	.77
When I feel that my sales approach is not working, I can easily change to another approach.	.81
I like to experiment with different sales approaches.	.86
Role Conflict CR = .89 $\alpha$ = .81 AVE = .73	
I receive incompatible requests from two or more groups of people.	.79
I have a lack of resources to complete assignments.	.87
I have a lack of time to do assignments.	.89
Customer Demandingness CR = .92 $\alpha$ = .87 AVE = .79	
My clients have high expectations for service and support.	.94
My clients require a perfect fit between their needs and our product/service offering.	.87
My clients expect me to deliver the highest levels of product and service quality.	.85
Customer Satisfaction with Salesperson* CR = .82 $\alpha$ = .68 AVE = .60	
Overall, I feel that my relationship with this rep is productive.	.78
The time and effort spent with this rep is worthwhile.	.72
This rep projects a professional image for his/her firm.	.83

\*Customer's response.

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