

## HOW DO U.S. AND U.K. SALESPEOPLE COMPARE ON THE DIMENSIONS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE AFFECT, AND CUSTOMER ORIENTATION LEVELS?

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*Identification of the variables that affect the performance of sales professionals has been an endeavor that has lasted for decades. Specification of individual variables that not only influence performance, but are amenable to both measurement and change has proven to be elusive. The purpose of this research is to assess two aspects of individual behavior which are measurable and may have profound impacts on training and development programs and selection considerations. The constructs of emotional intelligence and dispositional affect were hypothesized as being positively related to sales force performance. This study provides the empirical results of analyses designed to evaluate whether salesperson performance is significantly and positively related to the salesperson's level of emotional intelligence and his/her dispositional affect. Based on these findings, implications, conclusions and suggestions for future research are provided.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Personal selling in the United States (U.S.) is increasingly becoming more highly regarded as a profession. As such, it seems that personal selling is a subject which is included in many university courses on many college campuses (Michaels and Marshall 2002). However, in the United Kingdom (U.K.) it appears that personal selling receives relatively less attention and focus (Honeycutt et al. 1999; Lysonski and Durvasula 1998). Yet, while it seems that differences exist regarding the importance of personal selling as either a legitimate academic endeavor or as a career, differences in salesperson attitudes and perceptions have not been explicitly assessed. The primary purpose of this research is to empirically compare specific dimensions of salesperson perceptions and attitudes based on the salesperson's country of origin. Exploring these issues from an international perspective may be important for a variety of reasons. One of these reasons might

be attributable to the fact that different countries perceive the relative importance and prestige of sales positions in different ways (Honeycutt, Ford and Kurtzman 1996). For example, the sales profession is held in comparatively low esteem in Europe. In fact, it has been argued that recruiters in the U.K. have difficulties recruiting good sales personnel due to attitudes toward sales (Ellis 2000).

In an analysis of the importance of specific skills, attitudes and behaviors, a multinational perspective may be important because in some nations skills, attitudes and behaviors that relate to closing are regarded as being offensive (Honeycutt, Ford and Kurtzman 1996). Further, internationally, selling is often regarded as a profession that is low in status, requires manipulation, and does not contribute to societal goals (Lysonski and Durvasula 1998). Many authors note that international attitudes toward personal selling and sales as a career are far more deleterious than are attitudes found in the U.S. (which admittedly are generally not very positive) (Amin, Hayajneh and Nwakanma 1995; Hill and Birdseye 1989; Johansson 1997; Terpstra and Sarathy 1997).

Ellis (2000) contends that recruiters in the U.K. have difficulties recruiting good salespeople. Internationally, difficulties recruiting sales personnel from universities are recognized by others who note international students do not have positive attitudes toward personal selling as a career (Amin, Hayajneh and Nwakanma 1995; Lysonski and Druvasula 1998). Ellis (2000) sums up attitudes toward selling by stating “many European customers view salespeople like North Americans used to view used-car salespeople.” In the U.K. this is certainly the case and recruiting agencies are more likely to adopt the term “executive” or “consultant in sales” to increase the number of applications. These points indicate that the recruiting of international sales personnel may be a far more formidable task than is recruiting of domestic (U.S.) salespeople. A study comparing attitudes toward sales held by students in Singapore, New Zealand, India and the U.S. found that Singapore and New Zealand had significantly more negative thoughts about selling than did U.S. students. India, however, had the most positive perceptions of the four nations analyzed. Except for India, all three nations’ students felt that salespeople are pushy, aggressive and have low reputations. Salespeople are viewed as being low in professionalism, sales jobs are perceived as lacking intellectual challenge, and as not contributing to society (Lysonski and Durvasula 1998). Similar findings occurred in a study reported one year later. In this study the attitudes of students from New Zealand, the Philippines, and the U.S. were compared. The findings indicated that sales careers are perceived negatively by students from each of the three nations.

It is interesting to note that some research has assessed attitudes toward sales careers held by university students in countries such as the Philippines, New Zealand, India, etc. However, no study was discovered which examined attitudinal and psychological differences between salespeople in two nations. Culturally and historically, one could reasonably argue that the U.S. and U.K. have strong ties politically and economically. It seems

surprising to note that none of the research uncovered has explicitly compared attitudes and predispositions of salespeople in these two nations. The purpose of this research is to correct this deficiency.

### **HYPOTHESIS**

Based on the review of the literature, the central hypothesis of this study is that U.K. salesperson predispositions and psychological attributes will be significantly more negative than will be those possessed by U.S. salespeople. This hypothesis is largely based on research indicating that international attitudes toward sales are generally negative (Amin, Hayajneh and Nwakanma 1995; Hill and Birdseye 1989; Johansson 1997; Terpstra and Sarathy 1997). Furthermore, Ellis (2000) contends that sales in the U.K. is held in lower esteem than it is in the U.S. Based on these findings, the following is the central focus of the study:

Salespeople in the U.K. will have significantly lower levels of emotional intelligence, positive affect and customer orientation than will U.S. salespeople. Correspondingly, U.K. salespeople will have significantly higher levels of negative affect than will U.S. salespeople.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this research is to comparatively assess differences existing between levels of salesperson customer-orientation, emotional intelligence, positive affect and negative affect. The basic premise of the research was developed based on the perception that greater insights into salesperson characteristics may be garnered by comparing salespeople based on their countries of origin (U.S. and U.K.). Based on these considerations, the first step of the research process required the selection of samples that would facilitate the comparison of salespeople without the mitigating effects of potentially confounding variables. Following the selection of an appropriate sample, the second step entailed the development of a data collection instrument.

Based on the fact that the research was designed to compare salesperson predispositions and psychological attitudes, it was decided that salespeople should be employed in similar industries. Consequently, the sample consisted of salespeople employed in the healthcare industry. In the U.S. the sample consisted of 245 salespeople and in the U.K., the sample consisted of 107 salespeople employed in the healthcare industry. Following the specification of the sample, a survey was developed to accomplish the research objectives. The survey consisted of the following components:

### **Emotional Intelligence**

The current study uses the instrument developed by Schutte et al. (1998). The scale is a self-report measure that has been subjected to significant validity testing (Schutte et al. 1998). Strong conceptual grounding was used in the scale's development, since the model presented by Salovey and Mayer (1990) was used as the theoretical basis. The scale was subjected to correlations with theoretically related constructs, internal consistency replication, test-retest reliability, predictive validity, and discriminate validity with strong results for each analysis (Schutte et al. 1998). Although the instrument has been criticized for its self-report approach (Mayer and Salovey 1995), the instrument's validity appears to be robust. The scale is a 33-item self-report measure that includes items such as "By looking at their facial expression, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing," and "I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them." Respondents use a 5-point scale, on which a "1" represents "strongly disagree" and a "5" represents "strongly agree," to indicate to what extent each item describes them.

### **Dispositional Affectivity**

Positive and negative affect were measured using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988). The PANAS includes a list of 20 mood-relevant adjectives,

of which 10 indicate positive (e.g., active, enthusiastic) and 10 indicate negative (e.g., angry, afraid) mood states. Respondents are instructed to "indicate to what extent you generally feel this way, that is, how you feel on the average." Extensive validity evidence is provided by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988), Watson, Clark, and Carey (1988), and Watson (1988).

### **Customer-Orientation**

The key component of the survey entailed the measurement of customer-orientation. As noted, the concept of customer-orientation was operationalized by Saxe and Weitz (1982). Saxe and Weitz developed a 24 item scale which has been used in many studies of salesperson customer orientation (Brown, Widing and Coulter 1991; Dunlap, Dotson and Chambers 1988; Rozell, Pettijohn and Parker 2004; Thomas, Soutar and Ryan 2001; Periatt, LeMay, and Chakrabarty 2004). It has been described as a valid measure of one's customer-orientation levels (Periatt, LeMay and Chakrabarty 2004). Based on these factors, the SOCO scale developed by Saxe and Weitz (1982) was used in this research. This scale consists of 24 items using a seven point Likert-type scale (7 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree).

## **FINDINGS**

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this research entailed a comparative analysis of the levels of emotional intelligence, customer orientation, selling orientation, and positive and negative affect of healthcare salespeople working in the U.K. with those working in the U.S. The study's purposes were based on the desire to determine, empirically, whether differences exist based on the respondents' locales. As indicated in Table 1, the respondents consisted of 112 U.S. salespeople, for a response rate of 46 percent; and 77 U.K. salespeople, for a response rate of 72 percent. As shown in the table, demographically, the salespeople were similar. Salespeople in both countries had college degrees, the majority of

**TABLE 1**  
**Characteristics of the Sample**

Characteristic	Total Percent (n)	U.S. Percent (n)	U.K. Percent (n)
<b>Education:</b>			
College Degree	82.5 (155)	79.5 (87)	88.1 (69)
Graduate Degree	11.1 (25)	18.8 (21)	6.0 (4)
Other	3.4 (6)	1.8 ( 2)	6.0 (4)
<b>Position:</b>			
Management	9.0 (16)	1.8 (2)	21.6 (14)
Sales	91.0 (161)	98.2 (110)	78.4 (51)
<b>Compensation:</b>			
Salary	12.4 (22)	0	33.3 (22)
Salary and Commission	87.6 (156)	100.0 (112)	66.6 (44)
<b>Income:</b>			
< 40,000	1.1 (2)	0	3.2 (2)
\$40,001-60,000	8.0 (14)	0	22.2 (14)
\$60,001-80,000	14.4 (25)	0	40.0 (25)
> \$80,000	76.4 (133)	100.0 (100)	34.9 (22)
<b>Gender:</b>			
Male	72.8 (123)	80.4 (90)	64.2 (43)
Female	27.2 (46)	19.6 (22)	35.8 (24)
<b>Marital Status:</b>			
Single	14.0 (25)	10.5 (12)	19.4 (13)
Married	76.5 (137)	83.0 (93)	65.7 (44)
Divorced	9.5 (17)	6.3 (7)	14.9 (10)
	<b>Mean (sd)</b>	<b>Mean (sd)</b>	<b>Mean (sd)</b>
Age	36.6 (6.2)	35.9 (5.1)	37.8 (7.6)
<b>Employment (years):</b>			
With Present Comp.:	5.3 (4.3)	4.2 (3.7)	7.1 (5.0)
In current role:	5.0 (4.4)	4.2 (4.2)	6.4 (5.0)

salespeople sampled were male, married, between 35 and 40 years of age, and were compensated by a combination of salary and commission. A few differences that should be noted included the fact that salespeople in the U.K. were more likely to describe themselves

as managers, and were paid less (in U.S. dollars) than were their U.S. counterparts.

Based on the literature, the study might be divided into five primary research questions. The findings, as they relate to these research

questions are presented in Table 2. The first research question was related to emotional intelligence levels of the two groups. The findings indicate that no differences exist in the emotional intelligence scores of U.S. and U.K. salespeople. Thus, it appears that emotional intelligence may be a relatively stable construct, unaffected by cultural factors, as no significant differences were found in emotional intelligence scores for the salespeople sampled.

The second research question focused on the degree to which customer orientation levels might differ between U.S. and U.K. salespeople. It was anticipated that U.S. salespeople would have higher customer-orientation levels because in the U.S. the sales role is more culturally acceptable than it is in the U.K. As indicated in the table, U.S. salespeople were found to be significantly higher in their levels of customer orientation than were their U.K. counterparts.

Research question three was designed to assess the degree to which U.S. and U.K. salespeople were oriented toward making the sale, regardless of the buyers' needs. Since the questions were reverse scored, low scores would be indicative of higher levels of sales orientations or a desire to make the sale regardless of the customers' desires. Conversely, high scores were indicative of lower levels of a sales orientation, or a recognition that the sale should not be made unless the customer's needs were satisfied. It

was anticipated that U.K. salespeople would be less oriented toward making the sale, given that the research reviewed indicated that salespeople are not perceived positively in their culture. The findings agree with this perception, based on the fact that selling orientation levels are significantly lower (as noted in the reverse scoring) for U.K. salespeople compared with U.S. salespeople.

Research questions four and five were based on U.S. cultural stereotypes. Many in the U.S. perceive that their 'cousins across the pond' are more negative in their attitudes and attributions. Based on this gross stereotype, it was anticipated that respondents in the U.K. would have lower positive affect scores and higher negative affect scores than would U.S. salespeople. However, the findings indicate the stereotype is not valid for this group of respondents, as positive affect cores are significantly higher for U.K. salespeople than they are for U.S. salespeople. Consistently, U.K. salespeople have significantly lower negative affect scores than do the U.S. salespeople.

**CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The results suggest some significant differences with regard to sales person attitudes and predispositions based on their home countries. As noted, salespeople in the U.K. were significantly less customer-oriented and selling-oriented than were their U.S. counterparts. This

**TABLE 2**  
**Comparative Responses on Scales**

ITEM:	U.S. mean (s.d.)	U.K. mean (s.d.)	t-value (p)
Emotional Intelligence	107.5 (9.0)	105.8 (11.5)	1.3 (.19)
SOCO	173.8 (14.8)	172.4 (12.7)	.5 (.60)
Customer Orientation	105.1 (8.8)	98.9 (8.5)	4.6 (.0001)
Selling Orientation	62.7 (8.7)	73.6 (13.0)	2.9 (.004)
Positive Affect	31.6 (3.4)	34.2 (5.1)	4.1 (.0001)
Negative Affect	16.6 (3.3)	12.7 (4.3)	7.0 (.0001)

finding seems to suggest that U.K. salespeople are more likely to be apathetic with regard to either their customers' satisfaction levels or to their customers' purchase decisions. This is a negative result suggesting that U.K. sales representatives are inferior to their U.S. counterparts with regard to customer satisfaction and sales. However, as prior debate has noted the style of U.K. sales pitches are necessarily different due to the intrinsic views held regarding the sales and buyer roles (status) vis-à-vis negative connotations. Of further significance in this debate is the effectiveness of sales approaches in general, which have been increasingly placed under scrutiny as the traditional model based on sales results of salespeople (i.e., outcome performance) is shed. This is likely to be more apparent in highly competitive and prestigious sectors such as pharmaceuticals, where the roles of salespeople carry greater status and the verbal exchanges are more delicate in nature. Moreover, significant change and government-driven competitiveness has taken place manifesting in an altered attitude (and perhaps psyche) towards pharmaceutical sales in the precarious U.K. selling environment. Hence, we may assume that strategies increasingly rely on team-oriented selling and the building of long-term customer relationships (Corcoran et al. 1995). This would tend to explain the poor sales customer orientation scores, as U.K. sales teams build into their strategies greater tendencies towards customer lifetime value (CLV) in favor of sales volumes. Historically, U.K. sales management has based performance evaluation on high market share; selling high profit margin products; generating high sales revenue; selling new products/services; identifying and selling to major accounts; developing sales with long-term profitability; and exceeding all sales targets and objectives (Behrman and Perreault 1982). However, there are signs that this approach to performance evaluation is changing. We think it noteworthy that this research identified these differences in U.K. sales approach alongside higher than expected positive outlooks towards work in general. The idea that U.K. salespeople tend to be more positive in their outlooks toward work

than do their U.S. counterparts we found particularly unexpected given our discussions surrounding research questions 1-3.

This research has demonstrated empirically that our sample of U.K. salespeople are more likely to have positive attributions than are U.S. salespeople, who score higher on negative affect than do U.K. salespeople. This leads us to the conclusion that U.S. salespeople are more likely to possess negative attitudes toward their jobs. Both intuitively and theoretically this raises questions over the way in which sales management evaluate sales performance, and assign importance to the relationship building and value added initiatives used to augment the sales function. It also questions whether scholars have sufficiently researched this area to discern between traditional measure and more lasting lifetime value approaches to customer retention.

The final implication entails the recognition that emotional intelligence is a common trait of both U.S. and U.K. salespeople. Thus, it suggests that U.S. and U.K. sales forces alike might be assessed and trained in the area of emotional intelligence. Such a finding indicates that emotional intelligence seems to be a characteristic which is not culturally determined.

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