AN INVESTIGATION OF MARKET ORIENTATION'S AND SELECTED PERSONALITY TRAITS' RELATIONSHIP WITH DIMENSIONS OF CUSTOMER ORIENTATION IN SALESPERSONS

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A salesperson customer orientation (SCO) implements market orientation at the level of the individual. Historically, the SOCO scale has been used measured by adding the positive customer orientation (CO) item scores to the reversed negative selling orientation (SO) item scores and summing them. Previous research has identified a market orientation, Agreeableness and Openness to experience as positive influences on SCO. A path analysis model was tested in this study that included these variables plus the traits of forgiveness and gratitude. Data for the analysis were collected from 191 surveys administered to the sales force of an automobile dealership group. Results showed market orientation, gratitude, and forgiveness had positive and Openness a negative relationship with CO. Agreeableness had no significant relationship with CO or SO. Forgiveness was the only variable that had a negative relationship with SO and a positive relationship with CO.

INTRODUCTION

The idea that practicing an effective market orientation brings success to organizations (Day, 1994) is widespread. Salespersons that practice a customer orientation implement the marketing concept by placing their customers' interests first (Saxe and Weitz, 1982), but relatively little is known about what influences this type of customer orientation in individuals (Brown, Mowen, Donovan and Licata, 2002). Previous studies have separately focused on organizational influences and personal characteristics which contribute to this salesperson customer orientation (SCO). A gap exists in the literature investigating the simultaneous influences of organizational and personal forces on a customer orientation. This paper addresses this gap by testing the relationships of a firm's market orientation and the personality traits of gratitude, forgiveness, Agreeableness, and Openness to experience with the individual customer orientation of salespeople.

Conceptual Background and Hypotheses
Customer and selling orientations

Rindfleisch and Moorman (2003, p. 422) define customer orientation as "a set of behaviors and beliefs that places a priority on customers' interests and continuously creates superior value." An individual's SCO has been acknowledged as a critical factor in the formation and maintenance of customer satisfaction with a firm's customers. Customer-oriented selling reflects the practice of the marketing concept by an individual salesperson (Saxe and Weitz, 1982).   The importance of SCO is supported by studies finding positive relationships between customer orientation and measures of performance (Brown et al., 2002; Cross, Brashear, Rigdon and Bellenger, 2006; Siguaw, Brown, and Widing, 1994). A recent meta-analysis questioned these findings, but the authors state the relationship may change "as new evidence accumulates" (Franke and Park, 2006, p. 699).

Customer orientation at the individual level has frequently been measured by the SOCO scale (Saxe and Weitz, 1982)   which has twelve items each to measure solution-focused customer oriented (CO) behaviors and more
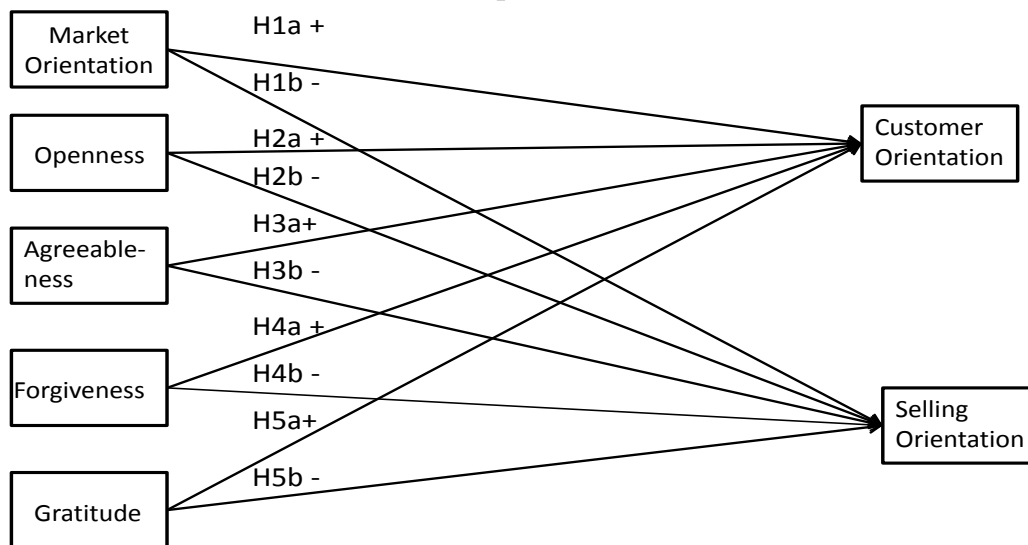
exploitive selling-focused behaviors (SO). Traditionally, the SO items have been reverse scored and added to the positively scored CO items to indicate the degree of SCO practiced by individuals. Recent research, however, has treated CO and SO as separate factors (Harris, Mowen and Brown, 2005; Johnson, Sivadas and Kashyap, 2009; Perriatt, LeMay and Chakrabarty, 2004; Thomas, Soutar and Ryan, 2001; Wachner,Plouffe, and Grégoire, 2009). This perspective has been adopted for this research.

Positive influences on SCO, meaning having a negative influence on SO and a positive influence on CO, have been identified in the sales and marketing literatures. These include the market orientation of the firm (Kirca, Jayachandran, and Bearden, 2005; Siguaw et

al., 1994; Williams and Attaway, 1996), job-related attitudes (O'Hara, Boles, and Johnston, 1991), and personality traits (Brown et al., 2002). No studies have been found, though, which restrict their focus to assessing the simultaneous influence of these variables on the SO and CO of individuals employed exclusively by the same firm.

This study investigates the relationships of a market orientation as an organizational level construct with SO and CO. The relationships of the Big Five personality factors, Agreeableness, and Openness to experience (Openness), with SO and CO are also assessed. I also test the relationships of the more specific, or narrower, personality traits of gratitude and forgiveness with SO and CO since narrower traits have been found to have greater

FIGURE 1
Conceptual Model

To aid in interpretation, paths representing unexplained relationships between the exogenous variables have been omitted.

predictive capacity (Ashton 1998; Paunonen and Ashton, 2001; Paunonen, 2003) and conceptual evidence suggests these traits should be positively related to the behaviors which characterize a customer orientation at the individual level.

Market orientation

Noble, Sinha and Kumar (2002) point out that the concepts of a market orientation provided by Narver and Slater (1990) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990) agree it is an organizational culture that includes a focus on understanding customer wants. Three behavioral components comprise a market orientation, customer orientation, customer orientation, and interfunctional coordination (Narver and Slater, 1990). A market orientation culture encourages the behaviors necessary for employees to implement the marketing concept (Dobni and Luffman, 2003) by shaping employee attitudes and behaviors. Siguaw et al. (1994) provide empirical evidence of a positive effect of a market orientation on customer orientation in salespersons (Siguaw et al., 1994). Since the customer orientation component of a market orientation involves understanding target customers' needs well enough to provide value (Narver and Slater, 1990), a market orientation is clearly intended to influence the customer orientation of individuals with the firm. Because a market orientation culture should influence positive customer oriented behaviors (Dobni and Luffman, 2003) aimed at creating value for the customer, it should also discourage the negative attitudes and behaviors of salespersons more oriented towards short-term personal gain. These positions are presented in the following hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 1a: Market orientation is positively related to a salesperson's customer orientation.*
>
> *Hypothesis 1b: Market orientation is negatively related to a salesperson's selling orientation.*

Openness to experience

The Big Five factor of Openness to experience has also been labeled Intellect in some studies. The traits of insight, intelligence and creativity are included in this factor (Digman, 1989). Individuals high in Openness are also perceptive, creative, imaginative, and inquisitive (Goldberg, 1990). Salespersons with these traits should be more likely to effectively probe for their customers' true needs and provide accurate, creative solutions to satisfy their customers. Periatt, Chakrabarty, and Lemay (2007) found a positive relationship between Openness and customer orientation in logistics sales representatives and other front line employees. Based on the preceding reasons, the following hypotheses are offered:

> *Hypothesis 2a: Openness to experience is positively related to a salesperson's customer orientation.*
>
> *Hypothesis 2b: Openness to experience is negatively related to a salesperson's selling orientation.*

Agreeableness

Agreeableness is one of the Big Five factors of personality and includes the traits of being helpful, cooperative, accommodating, understanding, adaptable, trustful and empathetic (Goldberg, 1990). Individuals high in Agreeableness tend to be concerned for the welfare of people they have personal contact with (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, and Knafo, 2002), such as customers. Brown et al., (2002) found that Agreeableness contributes to customer orientation, and it has also been found to have a positive relationship with customer orientation in logistics employees with customer contact job responsibilities, including salespeople (Periatt et al., 2007). Based on these reasons, the following hypotheses are presented:

> *Hypothesis 3a: Agreeableness is positively related to a salesperson's customer orientation.*
>
> *Hypothesis 3b: Agreeableness is negatively related to a salesperson's selling orientation.*

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is viewed as one of the most positive traits to possess in terms of repairing and continuing interpersonal relationships (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell and Finkel, 2004; McCullough, 2000). Additionally, experiencing guilt, which could lead one to seek forgiveness, even self-forgiveness, is also regarded as beneficial to relationships (Leith and Baumeister, 1998). Conflicts and disputes are regarded as unavoidable aspects of life in general, and transgressions occur quite often in most interpersonal relationships (Santelli, Struthers, and Eaton, 2009). Given the strong interpersonal nature of sales, this is especially relevant to business. Therefore, seeking and practicing forgiveness should contribute to the formation and maintenance of the relationships with customers that are central to effective marketing (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

A sense of entitlement is also regarded as a consistent predictor of unforgiveness (Exline et al. 2004) . Salespersons with a strong sense of entitlement should be less likely to be concerned about the needs of their customers and prospects and be more concerned with their own desires. Conversely, salespeople without this sense of entitlement should be focused more on the needs of others, including their customers and prospects. The strong interpersonal relationships and lack of a sense of entitlement present in salespersons high in forgiveness should allow them to comfortably interact with customers to discover and satisfy the customers' needs. Thus, the following hypotheses are developed:

Hypothesis 4a: Forgiveness is positively associated with a salesperson's customer orientation.
Hypothesis 4b: Forgiveness is negatively associated with a salesperson's selling orientation.

Gratitude

Gratitude is a trait linked with positive interpersonal feelings and higher levels of optimism (Emmons and McCullough, 2003), and hope (McCullough, Emmons and Tsang, 2004). Salespeople with higher levels of gratitude should be expected to have stronger social bonds and friendships (Emmons and McCullough, 2003), and be more empathetic (McCullough, Emmons and Tsang, 2002). Being more empathetic should help these salespersons have a greater understanding of their customers' needs, and greater optimism should propel them to provide solutions to their customers' needs with higher confidence. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are offered:

Hypothesis 5a: Gratitude is positively related to a salesperson's customer orientation
Hypothesis 5b: Gratitude is negatively related to a salesperson's selling orientation

METHOD

Research Methodology

Practicing a customer orientation involves discovering and satisfying the current and future needs of a customer, and a selling orientation involves exploiting potential customers for the primary purpose of short-term personal gain. For this reason, individuals whose primary job responsibility was to perform selling activities were chosen as an appropriate group for the sample. These individuals were employed as automobile sales representatives, sales managers, or Finance and Insurance (F&I) agents by a major automobile dealership in the southwest United States. Data from 191 survey questionnaires administered to these individuals were analyzed in this study.

The questionnaire was developed and tested for relevance and comprehension following recommendations in the survey literature (Dillman, 2000; Fowler, 2002; Schwab, 2005). The president of the firm, through email and personal communication, strongly recommended to the general managers at each location that sales personnel be given sufficient time to complete the surveys during a regularly

scheduled weekend sales meeting on a specific date. A personally signed cover-letter from the lead researcher and the president of the dealership group accompanied each survey to assure the participants of the confidentiality of their responses. Completed surveys were personally sealed in envelopes by each respondent, collected by local administrative managers, and mailed to corporate headquarters via company mail. The Human Resources Director shipped the completed surveys directly to me. A total of 191 useable surveys (N=191) were returned out of 211 distributed. Overall, a 90.5% response rate was realized. The support of the president and Human Resources Director of the firm was instrumental in securing such a high response rate. Since all surveys were completed and turned in to the home office on the same date, there were no issues with late responders, which would necessitate testing for nonresponse bias. Several reasons negated the necessity of such a test. The classic test for non-response bias is predicated on the assumption

of mail surveys, and the surveys in this study were distributed by hand to all locations and completed (or not) on the same day. They were not mailed out. Second, the best protection against nonresponse bias is to reduce nonresponse to a rate below 30%. Our survey collection design limited nonresponse to 9.5%, which is far superior to 30%. Finally, nonresponse bias testing is designed for mail surveys conducted in waves (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). The data collection method in our study was implemented on a single day, and is not comparable.

Twenty surveys were not utilized due to excessive amounts of missing data. Appropriate items from the retained surveys were re-coded, and missing values were imputed with the Expectation Maximization (EM) algorithm (Little and Rubin, 2002), according to the recommendations of Jöreskog and Sörbom (2002) using PRELIS 2. This procedure was selected for imputation because

TABLE 1:
CFA Model Measures of Fit and Item Factor Loadings

	MO	OP	AG	FRG	GR	CO	SO
CFI	.99	1.0	1.0	.97	1.00	.98	.99
SRMR	.03	.01	.05	.05	0.0	.03	.03
					*saturated		
Item 1	.71	.86	.81	.59	.91	.76	.74
Item 2	.74	.81	.85	.64	.77	.71	.75
Item 3	.87	.71	.66	.70	.55	.82	.83
Item 4	.83	.74	.63	.64		.81	.80
Item 5	.76			.80		.81	.86
Item 6	.77			.72		.80	.78
Item 7	.76			.62			
Item 8				.89			
Item 9				.69			

Key: MO = Market Orientation, OP = Openness, AG = Agreeableness, FRG = Forgiveness, GR = Gratitude, CO= Customer Orientation, SO =Selling Orientation

the EM method minimizes the bias in the estimated model (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 1999, p. 603).

The respondents were predominantly male (88%) with an average age of just over 40 years (40.26 years). The average length of employment with the dealership was approximately 2 ½ years (30.95 months). Ethnically, 43.5% were Caucasian, 18.3% were Hispanic, 14% were African-American, and 8.4% were Asian. 54.5% were married and 24.6% were single or separated/divorced. Over 80% (80.1) had at least some college education, with 39.3% holding bachelor or advanced degrees. I chose individuals whose primary job responsibility was to perform selling activities as an appropriate group for the sample. These individuals were employed as automobile sales representatives, sales managers, or Finance and Insurance (F&I) agents by a major automobile dealership in the southwest United States. Market orientation was measured using seven items from the market orientation scale developed by Narver

and Slater (1990). Responses ranging from "1-strongly disagree" to "5-strongly agree" anchor this scale. Agreeableness and Openness to experience (Openness) were measured using four items each from the appropriate sub-scales from Saucier's (1994) Big Five Mini-markers instrument. Each personality factor is assessed by single adjective items with responses ranging from "1-extremely accurate" to "9-extremely inaccurate." Forgiveness was measured with the nine items from the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson and Snyder, 2003). A 7-point response scale anchored by "1-almost always false of me" to "7-almost always true of me" is used in this scale. Gratitude was assessed with three items from the GQ-6 (McCullough et al., 2002). Values of (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) anchor this 7-point scale. Six of the first twelve items of the SOCO scale (Saxe and Weitz, 1982) were used to measure customer orientation (CO), and six of the remaining twelve items, which were not reverse scored in this analysis, were used to measure selling orientation (SO).

TABLE 2:
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Market Orientation	1.00						
Openness to Experience	-0.05	1.00					
Agreeableness	-0.12	0.78**	1.00				
Forgiveness	0.12	-0.16*	-0.24**	1.00			
Gratitude	0.28**	0.04	0.01	0.14*	1.00		
Customer Orientation	0.38**	-0.30**	-0.29**	0.26**	0.28**	1.00	
Selling Orientation	-0.18*	0.211**	0.20**	-0.31**	-0.19**	-0.17	1.00
Mean	29.77	12.20	11.63	47.45	13.42	50.40	18.56
Standard Deviation	5.29	7.37	7.30	9.41	2.21	4.95	13.00
Cronbach's alpha	.90	.76	.81	.83	.73	.90	.91
Composite Reliability	.92	.86	.83	.89	.80	.91	.91
Average variance extracted	.61	.61	.55	.49	.58	.62	.63

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level   **Correlation is significant at the .01 level

RESULTS

Path analysis, a type of structural equation modeling (SEM), was used to test the proposed relationships (Kline, 2005). The correlation matrix of the purified measures was used as input with LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 2001) utilized to estimate the model. The use of the correlation matrix is justified because the pattern of relationships between the constructs is of primary interest in this study (Hair et al., 1999). Path analysis is appropriate because there were only single measures of each observed variable, a priori hypotheses about the relationships between the variables exists (Kline, 2005), and it provides for a simultaneous assessment of the set of relationships depicted in the model (Hair et al., 1999; Kline, 2005). Prior to estimating the model, the unidimensionality of each measure was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on each individual measure. Items were dropped from several scales due to empirical or

theoretical considerations as recommended when a converged, proper solution is obtained, but overall model fit is unacceptable (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). Estimated loadings were examined, and the measures were purified by eliminating the items with insufficient loading values (Hair et al., 1999). The final models exceeded the guidelines for models with N < 250 which call for a CFI value close to 0.95 and SRMR values < .08 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). These values are included for the final models in Table 1. Composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) for each purified measure was then computed. Guidelines in the literature suggest that composite reliability values should exceed .70, and AVE values should be greater than .50 (Hair et al., 1999). As shown in Table 2, each measure surpassed these guidelines with the exception of the forgiveness measure which had an AVE of .49. These steps were necessary since PA does not use latent variables which enable the model to take measurement error into account.

TABLE 3:
Model Results

	Model 1	β	t-value	Model 2	β	t-value
H_{1a}: MO → CO	**Supported**	.29	4.49		.30	4.56
H_{1b}: MO → SO	Not supported	.11	1.49			
H_{2a}: OPEN → CO	Not supported	-.24	-2.37		-.27	-4.26
H_{2b}: OPEN → SO	Not supported	.15	1.41			
H_{3a}: AGRE → CO	Not supported	-.04	-0.38			
H_{3b}: AGRE → SO	Not supported	.02	0.22			
H_{4a}: FRGV → CO	**Supported**	.16	2.43		.15	2.34
H_{4b}: FRGV → SO	**Supported**	-.21	-2.89		-.31	-4.37
H_{5a}: GRAT → CO	**Supported**	.18	2.77		.19	2.87
H_{5b}: GRAT → SO	Not supported	-.13	-1.84			
X^2	.11					13.76
df	16					21
p	1.00					.88
CFI	1.00					1.00
SRMR	.04					.058

Therefore, because there is only one observed measure of each construct, it is critical that each measure have good psychometric properties (Kline,2005).

Since all measures were self-reported, the presence of common method bias was a concern. Recommendations in the organizational literature were followed to minimize common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, 2003) by methodologically separating the independent and criterion variables and guaranteeing confidentiality to the respondents. Harman's single factor test was conducted, which did not reveal a general factor that explained the majority of the variance. No evidence of common method bias was detected.

A path diagram representing the hypothesized relationships is shown in Figure 1. It is important to remember in conducting path analysis that unanalyzed associations between the exogenous (independent) variables are assumed, but the reasons for the assumed covariances are unknown (Kline, 2005, p.97). Based on the results in Table 3, a market orientation, forgiveness, and gratitude all have a significant, positive relationship with CO. Openness had a significant, negative relationship with CO, and Agreeableness had no significant relationship with CO or SO. Forgiveness also had the only significant relationship with SO, and it was negative.

H_{1a} stated that a market orientation was positively related to a customer orientation. This was supported with a $\beta = .29$ and a t-value $= 4.49$ in the model. H1b tested a negative relationship between a market orientation and SO, and no support for this was provided in the results ($\beta=.10$; t-value $= -1.47$). H_{2a} hypothesized a positive relationship between Openness and CO and was not supported since Openness was found to have a negative, significant relationship with CO ($\beta= -.24$; t-value $= -2.37$). Due to the counterintuitive nature of this finding, the data from the original surveys were reviewed for recoding accuracy by auditing multiple cases selected at random.

No errors were found. No support for the negative relationship between Openness and SO in H_{2b} was provided with a $\beta= -.17$ and a t-value $= -1.56$. A $\beta= -.03$ and a t-value of -.031 failed to provide support for a positive relationship between Agreeableness and CO in H_{3a}. Likewise, a $\beta = 0.0$ and a t-value of -.02 failed to support the hypothesized negative relationship between Agreeableness and SO in H_{3b}. Both hypotheses concerning forgiveness, H_{4a} and H4b, were supported. The positive, significant relationship between forgiveness and CO in H4a gained support with a $\beta = .15$ and a t-value of 2.25 and the negative relationship between forgiveness and SO in H_{4b} was detected with a $\beta = .25$ and a t-value of 3.50. A $\beta = .19$ and t-value of 2.88 supported H5a which forecast a positive relationship between gratitude and CO, but the negative relationship between gratitude and SO predicted in H5b did not materialize ($\beta= .13$; t-value $= 1.88$). According to the squared multiple correlations (SMC), this model explained 29% of the variance in CO and 16% in SO.
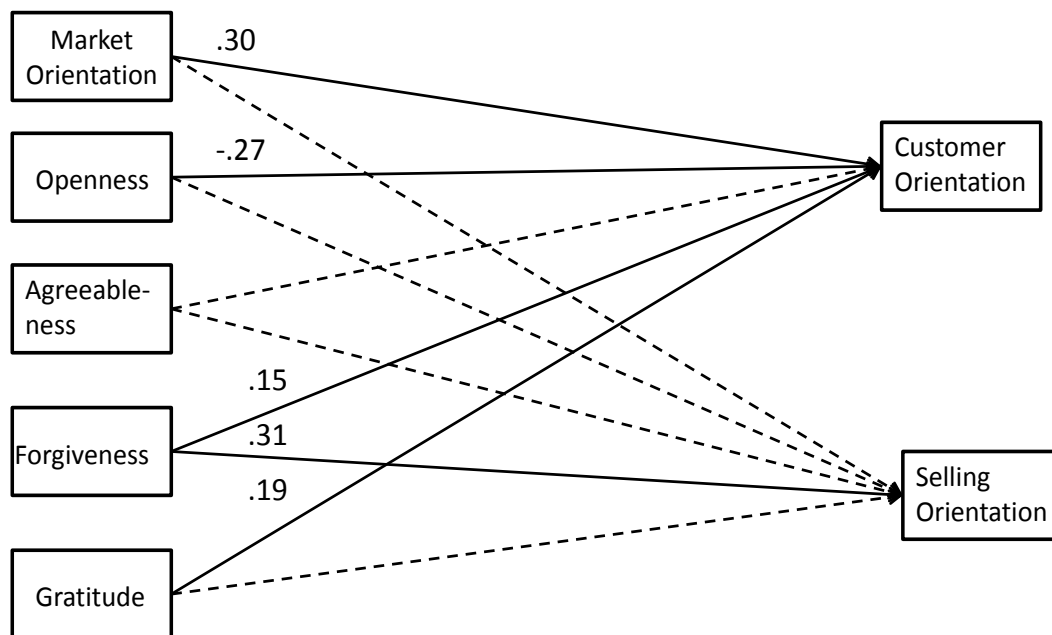
Given the results of Model 1, non-significant paths were trimmed and a second model was estimated with only the supported paths included. Although there were some slight changes in β values, no substantive changes were noted and all previously supported relationships were still significant. The SMC values were 29% for CO and 9% for SO.

In summary, a market orientation, forgiveness, and gratitude were found to be beneficially related to CO. Several surprising findings were noted. First, Openness was found to have a significant, negative relationship with CO which ran counter to expectations. Second, no significant relationship with either CO or SO was supported for Agreeableness. Finally, only forgiveness had a significant, negative relationship with SO.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

There were several surprising findings in this study. First, neither of the Big Five personality

FIGURE 2
Hypothesized paths supported

Solid lines indicate supported paths. Dashed lines indicate trimmed paths.

factors of Agreeableness or Openness was positively related to either dimension of a salesperson's customer orientation. Conceptually, agreeable individuals should be more likely to help their customers meet their needs and gain a better understanding of their customers' situations by being more empathetic. However, there may be other aspects of Agreeableness, such as being accommodating and trusting, which may foster an underlying tension with other traits associated with salespersons high in Agreeableness. For example, customers may come in with cautious, uncooperative mindsets after becoming familiarized with information from trusted internet authorities such as Edmunds.com (Jacobs, 2001; Reed, 2008) or consumerreports.org (Consumer Reports, n.d.). Articles such as these warn consumers against deceptive, manipulative, and high-pressure tactics sometimes employed at automobile

dealerships making the establishment of trust problematic. To be fair, these practices are not confined to consumer automobile sales. Some customers may come in feeling entitled to an attractive deal that would generate low or even negative profit for the dealership. Simply agreeing to customer wishes such as these would be incompatible with an organizational goal of profitability which is a hallmark of the marketing concept. When barriers to communication such as these exist, it may prove too difficult to be empathetic, effectively determine a customer's needs, and help them by suggesting the correct solution. Thus, the different aspects of Agreeableness may cancel each other out during interactions with customers.

Openness was surprisingly found to have a negative relationship with CO. Since salespersons high in Openness should be more

insightful, inquisitive, perceptive, and creative (Digman, 1989; Goldberg, 1990), they should be equipped to more readily and accurately address the needs of customers with proper sales solutions. But these same qualities may also lead a salesperson to circumvent desirable procedures with their innate cleverness. Because of their perceptiveness, they may occasionally adopt "closed influence" strategies to manipulate and deceive customers (Brown, 1990; Chakrabarty, Brown & Widing, 2011) which is more characteristic of a SO. Such activities may even be evoked if salespersons perceive their managers emphasize outcomes rather than behaviors when evaluating sales performance. Again, the breadth of traits present in such a broad personality factor may tend to cancel out the unique effects of each trait.

Market orientation, forgiveness, and gratitude each had positive relationships with CO. This provides further support to the belief that organizational cultures such as a market orientation can shape desirable behaviors and that screening with proper employee selection criteria could result in a sales force more likely to practice a SCO. It is surprising that a market orientation was not found to have the expected negative relationship with a SO. A possible explanation is that while salespersons desire to practice a SCO, at times they lack the motivation to do so. This could be a result of inconsistencies on the part of sales managers who encourage a SCO but, under pressure to perform at deadlines, encourage more selling oriented behaviors. Practicing a CO requires more effort than practicing a SO, and salespersons have to be motivated to utilize a customer oriented type of selling (Thakor and Joshi, 2009). This may indicate that many salespersons have not fully internalized the values of a market orientation. This could be a case of poor person-environment (PE) fit, which includes in its definition that the organization and employee are compatible because they share similar fundamental characteristics (Kristof, 1996), or it could mean there is a lack of motivational support to

continue practicing a CO. Salespersons who are hired without possessing traits that make them more likely to refrain from practicing an SO may have difficulty in avoiding behaviors that lead to short term gain when faced with performance pressure from managers or themselves.

This finding differs to some extent from the findings in existing studies (Kirca, Jayachandran, and Bearden, 2005; Siguaw et al., 1994; Williams and Attaway, 1996) since these studies did not distinguish between the effects attributable to the separate CO and SO dimensions of the SOCO scale. To be clear, a market orientation was found in this study to encourage customer oriented behaviors, but not to discourage selling oriented behaviors.

Ideally, salespersons would embrace the behaviors of a CO and avoid the behaviors of a SO, but surprisingly, forgiveness was the only variable with support for these relationships. To be more precise, forgiveness had the broadest relationship with the desirable aspects of behaviors assessed by SOCO since it had a positive relationship with CO and a negative relationship with SO. Forgiveness may act as a regulatory mechanism within salespersons to suppress the inclinations to get angry and act in ways that are either inconsistent with a CO or consistent with a SO. For example, customers who are guarded, defensive, dismissive or abrasive may provoke feelings of anger by blocking the goal (Carver and Harmon-Jones, 2009) a salesperson would have of helping the customer by selling them a solution to their needs. Anger tends to provoke activities that inflict harm or pain on the offending party (Carver and Harmon-Jones, 2009), which could take the form of less willingness to help customers achieve goals they deem as helpful to themselves, such as purchasing something that will provide a solution to their problem. There is another aspect to forgiveness in a salesperson that must be considered, and that is self-forgiveness. A salesperson may catch their self behaving in a manner that is more selling oriented than customer oriented, especially if a sale is not made. This could lead to feelings of

guilt (Kim, Thibodeau, and Jorgensen, 2009) which lead to regret only if a salesperson assumes responsibility for the undesirable behaviors (Zeelenberg, van den Bos, van Diejk, and Pieters, 2002). By practicing self-forgiveness, a salesperson may then be more likely to persist in pursuing the goal of practicing a SCO which is consistent with experiencing regret (Zeelenberg et al., 2002).

Perhaps the most useful finding in this study is that carefully selected personality characteristics such as gratitude and forgiveness have stronger positive relationships with a salesperson's customer orientation than the more broadly studied personality factors from the Big Five, Agreeableness and Openness to experience. This is not an argument to ignore the beneficial effects of a market orientation, but suggests that some employee characteristics make it more likely a customer orientation may be practiced in its entirety in interactions with customers. A market orientation was found to encourage desirable behaviors, but in this study did nothing to discourage undesirable behaviors. Firms that wish to practice a market orientation should be concerned with both aspects of this at the level of customer interaction.

Day's (1994) observation that very little is known about how to build a market orientation may still ring true, particularly at the level of the salesperson. This paper provides some evidence that attention to carefully selected personality traits in the selection process may help build a sales force inherently stronger in the behaviors that typify a customer orientation, and may have similar importance to cultural influences of the firm on these behaviors. To the extent that salespersons interact with outsiders (customers) rather than fellow employees, the values promoted by a corporate culture, such as a market orientation, may take a great deal of time to be internalized to influence their behaviors. Rather, salespersons high in certain traits seem better equipped to fully embrace a salesperson customer orientation. Although Agreeableness and Openness have been shown to predict customer orientation in some settings, there may be industry or organizational factors that differ from this study which came into play. Future researchers are encouraged to consider conceptually relevant personality traits when investigating potential influences of a customer orientation in salespeople.

LIMITATIONS

This study drew a sample from salespeople in only one industry which included a small percentage of women. This is quite characteristic of the automobile industry. An additional limitation is that the sample was drawn from a rather concentrated geographical area. Characteristics of salespeople in other regions of the United States, or in other countries, may be quite different. Each of these limitations weakens the generalizability of the results from this research.

There may be additional, relevant variables omitted from the model which could account for substantive amounts of variance in the relationships studied. No attempt was made to control for the influence of variables such as social desirability or impression management, which could conceivably bias some of the relationships. Common method bias, which could be a serious limitation, may be present since all measures were self reported, although an attempt to limit and assess its potential effects was made in accordance with recommendations in the literature (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additional studies, which obtain data from sources other than self-reports, could effectively address this limitation.

The fact that this was a cross-sectional study is a limitation on drawing inferences regarding the precise nature of the relationship between the constructs studied in this research. Longitudinal studies of the relationships between these variables, and similar studies in different settings, would help overcome this limitation.

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APPENDIX
Study Measures

Gratitude

* I have so much in life to be thankful for.
*If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.
*I am grateful to a wide variety of people.

Market Orientation

*Our business objectives are driven by customer satisfaction.
*We respond rapidly to competitive actions.
*We closely monitor and assess our level of commitment in serving customer's needs.
*Our competitive advantage is based on understanding customer's needs.
*Business strategies are driven by the goal of increasing customer value.
*We pay close attention to after-sales service.
*Our managers understand how employees can contribute to value of customers.

Forgiveness

*I hold grudges against myself for negative things I've done.
*It is really hard for me to accept myself once I've messed up.
*I don't stop criticizing myself for negative things I've felt, thought, said, or done.
*I continue to punish a person who has done something that I think is wrong.
*I continue to be hard on others who have hurt me.
*If others mistreat me, I continue to think badly of them.
*When things go wrong for reasons that can't be controlled, I get stuck in negative thoughts about it.
*If I am disappointed by uncontrollable

circumstances in my life, I continue to think negatively about them.
*It's really hard for me to accept negative situations that aren't anybody's fault.

SOCO

*I try to influence a customer by information rather than pressure.
*I offer the product of mine that is best suited to the customer's problem.
*I try to find out what kind of product would be most helpful to a customer.
*I answer a customer's questions about products as correctly as I can.
*I try to give customers an accurate expression of what the product will do for them.
*I try to figure out what a customer's needs are.
*If I am not sure what product is right for a customer, I will still apply pressure to get him to buy
*I decide what products to offer on the basis of what I can convince customers to buy, not on the basis of what will satisfy them in the long run.
*I spend more time trying to persuade a customer to buy than I do trying to discover her needs.
*I imply to a customer that something is beyond my control when it is not.
*I begin the sales talk for a product before exploring a customer's needs with him.
*I treat a customer as a rival.

Agreeableness

*Warm
*Cooperative
*Unsympathetic
*Harsh

Openness

*Imaginative
*Philosophical
*Intellectual
*Complex

*Items retained in measure
Reverse coded items in italics