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DISCUSSION PAPERS

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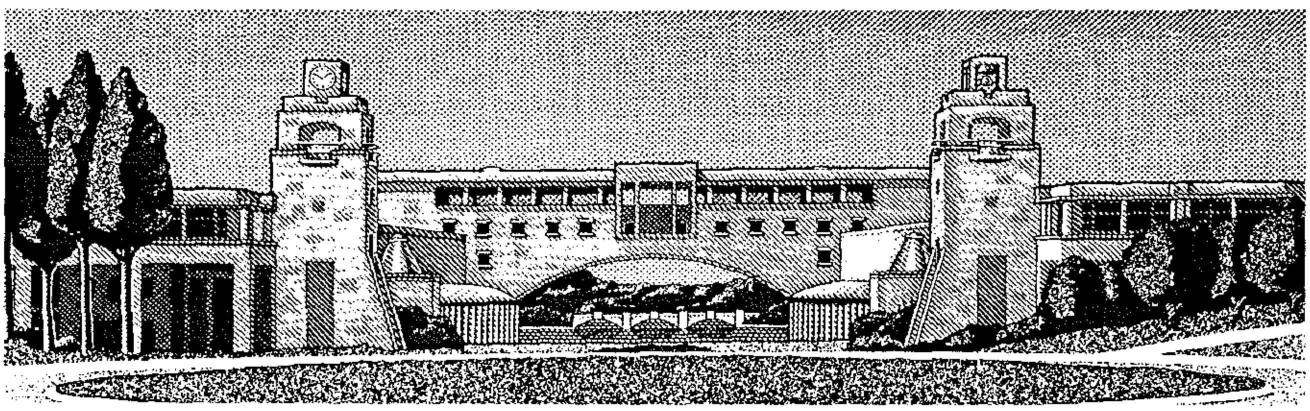

B O N D U N I V E R S I T Y

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MARKET ORIENTATION OF THE FIRM ON SALESFORCE BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES

by

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The Influence of the Market Orientation of The Firm on Salesforce Behavior and Attitudes

Abstract

A national sample of 306 industrial salespeople were used to empirically investigate a model incorporating the constructs of market orientation, customer orientation, a difference score, and job attitudes. The findings indicate that the selected market orientation of the firm significantly influences salesperson customer orientation and job attitudes.

The Influence of the Market Orientation of The Firm
on Salesforce Behavior and Attitudes

It has been suggested that the firm examine the external environment in which it operates prior to adopting a highly market-oriented organizational behavior as the strategy of choice (Houston 1986; Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Narver and Slater 1990). The degree to which the firm implements a market orientation is based upon its desired level of organizationwide concern and responsiveness to customer needs and competitive actions (Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Narver and Slater 1990). Upon deciding the strategy of choice, an important aspect of implementation is to influence salespeople to adopt the chosen orientation in their selling efforts.

A firm, for example, can instill a customer-oriented philosophy and provide the training, resources, and reward system necessary to support and motivate a highly customer-oriented salesforce (Schlesinger and Heskett 1991). Conversely, an organization can foster a strong selling-oriented salesforce by rewarding, for example, the immediate sale without regard for customer interests. Finally, firms can send mixed signals and/or attempt to reside between the extremes, which Narver and Slater (1990) suggest may be the least effective position to adopt from a sales performance standpoint.

Our first research objective is concerned with identifying the effect of the selected firm orientation, as viewed from the salesperson's perspective, on the salesperson's customer orientation and job attitudes (i.e., role ambiguity and conflict, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment). The second research objective, a corollary to the first, is to determine whether the orientation of the salesperson is related to job attitudes. That is, is adopting a selling or customer orientation related to role stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment?

While a market orientation ranging from high to low might be selected by the firm, it seems clear that a strong correspondence should exist between the orientation desired at the firm level and the orientation practiced by its salesforce. As advanced by Webster (1991), "...employees, from the top-level executives to the operational-level workers, should have basically the same or consistent attitudes toward...the marketing orientation of the firm..." (p. 342). A high level of agreement between the orientations of the firm and salesforce may also benefit the firm by providing a positive influence upon job-related attitudes held by the salesforce. When the orientations of salespeople deviate from the selected behaviors of their firms, however, what effect, if any, do these incongruous orientations have upon the job attitudes of these salespeople? The third research objective is to examine if differences in orientations affect the job-related attitudes of salespeople.

Using the existing literature, a model is developed to describe the relationships between market orientation, customer orientation, and the job attitudes of salespeople. The model also depicts the proposed effects on job attitudes that result from differences between the firm and salesperson orientations. The hypothesized relationships are tested with a sample of industrial salespeople and the results are presented with respect to previous findings and their implications for salesforce management.

MARKET AND CUSTOMER ORIENTATIONS

"Market orientation consists of three behavioral components--customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interfunctional coordination..." (Narver and Slater 1990, p. 21).

Narver and Slater, consistent with Kohli and Jaworski (1990), have defined customer and competitor orientations as information acquisition and dissemination activities, which are necessary to understand what buyers value and the capabilities of and strategies used by competitors in serving target buyers. This knowledge provides a framework in which to create superior value for customers relative to competitors. The third component involves coordinating across the firm's departmental activities in order to deliver superior value to buyers.

The scale developed to measure the market orientation of the firm (Narver and Slater 1990), including the customer orientation component, differs from the SOCO scale (Saxe and Weitz 1982), which measures the selling orientation-customer orientation of the salesperson (in referring to this scale we often use customer orientation of the salesperson for the sake of brevity). The market orientation scale assesses behaviors at the firm level, whereas the SOCO scale examines specific sales behaviors at the salesperson level. The behaviors of the firm explicated in the market orientation scale are indicative of the level of meaningful support provided to salespeople, the capability of salespeople to provide superior value to customers, and a philosophical orientation to help guide salesperson conduct. From the view of the salesforce, the components indicated in the market orientation scale represent the instruments with which salespeople are equipped to engage a customer orientation in their selling efforts. The relationships between the firm's behaviors, as viewed by the salesperson, and the salesperson's actions and job attitudes, are posited in the following section.

MODELS AND HYPOTHESES

Market Orientation

Past research has observed that market orientation is the set of activities and behaviors implemented to reflect the degree to which the marketing concept has been adopted as a business philosophy (Jaworksi and Kohli 1992). A market orientation emanates from the firm's leadership down through the organization (cf. Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Narver and Slater 1990). As previously noted, the firm possesses the means of influencing the customer orientation of its salesforce, and is rational in expecting the salesforce to behave and respond to customer needs in a manner that is congruent with the firm's market orientation. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the market orientation of the firm has a strong influence on the customer orientation of the salesforce.

Kohli and Jaworski (1990), moreover, posited a positive relationship between the firm's market orientation and customer satisfaction. However, to the customer "the salesperson is the firm" (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990); therefore, one important element to achieving customer satisfaction is the increased customer orientation of the front-line company representatives, the salesforce. Thus, a positive linkage between the market orientation of the firm to the customer orientation of the salesperson is proposed, which is implicitly presumed by Kohli and Jaworski. That is, the more salespeople perceive their firms to practice and reward the use of the marketing concept, the greater their focus on customer needs (Figure 1 depicts all relationships in the model).

H_1: The greater the market orientation of the firm, the greater the customer orientation of the salesperson.

--Insert Figure 1--

The market orientation of the firm may not only affect the customer orientation of the salesforce, but might also affect their job attitudes. It seems that industrial salespeople naturally desire a highly market-oriented organization (Kohli and Jaworski 1990). Because of their boundary-spanning role, industrial salespeople may perceive some degree of role conflict stemming from inconsistent or incompatible demands made by the customer and the salesperson's firm. For example, a lesser market-oriented firm may expect the salesperson to engage in highly selling-oriented behaviors, whereas the salesperson may prefer to act in the better interests of the customer. Indeed, role conflict has been cited as being a certain, although uncoveted, characteristic of many sales environments (cf. Behrman and Perreault 1984; Donnelly and Ivancevich 1975; Franke, Behrman, and Perreault 1982). A highly market-oriented firm, however, may reduce the contradictory demands placed upon the salesperson, thereby reducing this source of conflict.

H_2: The greater the market orientation of the firm, the lower the role conflict experienced by the salesperson.

Role ambiguity is the result of uncertainty concerning standards by which job performance is judged to be adequate. The salesperson is unsure of what should be done and how, and does not know which job functions are most important to the various role partners (Behrman and Perreault 1984; Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1972). Kohli and Jaworski (1990) proposed that one benefit of a firm utilizing a market orientation would be the resulting decrease in ambiguity for employees, particularly in terms of how much effort the employees should exert regarding market-oriented tasks. In addition, we have previously suggested that a high market orientation by the firm may serve as a clear and well-received guide by salespersons, which should serve to reduce role ambiguity.

H_3: The greater the market orientation of the firm, the lower the role ambiguity of the salesperson.

The organizational environment fostered by the implementation of market-oriented activities and behaviors has been proposed to elicit a feeling of pride and rewarding contribution from employees. Recently, for example, Kohli and Jaworski (1990) hypothesized and provided exploratory research to support the notion that a firm with a strong market orientation will realize employees with greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment than organizations with a lesser market orientation. Based upon their tentative findings, we postulate similar relationships.

H_4: The greater the market orientation of the firm, the greater the job satisfaction experienced by the salesperson.

H_5: The greater the market orientation of the firm, the greater the organizational commitment of the salesperson.

Customer Orientation

Customer orientation is a selling behavior in which salespersons assist customers in making purchase decisions that will satisfy long-term wants and needs (Michaels and Day 1985; Saxe and Weitz 1982). Some studies have envisioned customer orientation as an outcome of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (cf. Hoffman and Ingram 1991; O'Hara, Boles, and Johnston 1991). This study, however, conceptualizes customer orientation as an antecedent of job attitudes. That is, the firm's market orientation affects the salesperson's customer orientation, which in turn, affects job attitudes. Specifically, highly customer-oriented salespeople are postulated to have lower role conflict and ambiguity, and higher job satisfaction and commitment than their selling-oriented counterparts. It seems quite plausible, however, that customer orientation both affects and is affected by job attitudes; nevertheless, we focus on how customer orientation affects job attitudes and leave for future research the study of other relationships.

Empirical evidence exists to indicate that salespeople, with few exceptions, practice a customer orientation (CO) versus a selling orientation (SO); the means of the SOCO construct, for example, measured on a nine-point scale (9 = high customer orientation), have been previously reported as 7.6 and 7.7 (Saxe and Weitz 1982) and 8.1 (Hoffman and Ingram 1991). Further, customers expect salespeople to meet their unique needs. They have definite expectations of the salesperson and apply pressure to achieve conformity with those expectations (Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1972). To the extent that the salesperson practices a customer orientation, he or she will strive to satisfy customer needs and desires, thereby reducing at least the portion of the role conflict and ambiguity which can be attributed to customer interactions.

H_6: The greater the customer orientation of the salesperson, the lower the role conflict experienced by the salesperson.

H_7: The greater the customer orientation of the salesperson, the lower the role ambiguity of the salesperson.

As previously discussed under market orientation, recent research has argued that a feeling of pride occurs when organizations and their employees work toward the common goal of customer satisfaction, and that this positive affective response toward the work situation results in increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Jaworski and Kohli 1992; Kohli and Jaworski 1990). Further, earlier studies have provided empirical evidence of a positive relationship between job satisfaction and customer orientation (cf. Bateman and Organ 1983; Hoffman and Ingram 1991; Motowidlo 1984), and a positive relationship between organizational commitment and customer orientation (O'Hara, Boles, and Johnston 1991). We propose similar relationships for the customer orientation construct. Specifically, engaging in customer-oriented behaviors is hypothesized to result in higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

H_8: The greater the customer orientation of the salesperson, the greater the job satisfaction experienced by the salesperson.

H_9: The greater the customer orientation of the salesperson, the greater the organizational commitment of the salesperson.

Difference Between Customer and Market Orientations

Although the firm should have a strong influence on the orientation of its salesforce, salespeople, nevertheless, may deviate from the orientation of their firm. The boundary-spanning role of salespeople, for example, may explain why industrial sales representatives could be more highly customer-oriented than the firm is market-oriented. The salesperson's loyalties can be divided when the policies and programs of the organization are perceived to be at odds with the needs and demands of his or her customers (cf. Chonko, Howell, and Bellenger 1986; Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1972). Moreover, the industrial salesperson typically works without any close supervision and is most often physically and psychologically separated from the home office (Behrman and Perreault 1984; Teas, Wacker, and Hughes 1979). This isolation from the parent office and close proximity to the customer may encourage the salesperson to feel a greater loyalty to the customer than to his or her own employer. Salespeople may, therefore, exercise a higher level of customer orientation than the firm desires. For example, these salespeople may sacrifice the immediate sale (contrary to firm wishes), in the best interests of their customers and maintenance of long-term customer relationships (Saxe and Weitz 1982; Michaels, and Day 1985).

Alternatively, it is also possible that the salesperson possesses a lower customer orientation than the firm's market orientation. For example, separation and a lack of "in the field" supervision may enable the salesperson to engage in opportunistic behavior by focusing on the immediate sale, despite this being against firm wishes and the longer term interests of the firm (Anderson and Oliver 1987).

A difference between the orientations of the salesperson and the firm is proposed to affect the job attitudes of the salesperson. A variable labeled DIFF has been created to identify the difference, as perceived by the salesperson, between the market orientation of the employing organization and the customer orientation of the salesperson. It is posited that the intensity of perceived role conflict will decrease as the difference between the market orientation of the firm and the customer orientation of the salesperson decreases. When the salesperson perceives compatibility between the role demanded by his or her own customer orientation and the role imposed by the organization, the perception of role conflict is lessened.

An agreement of orientations between the firm and salesperson should also facilitate the communication of expectations because both parties are of one mind (e.g., achieving customer satisfaction). Therefore, these similar expectations between the firm and the salesforce should decrease role ambiguity. A gap between the orientations of the firm and its salesforce, however, complicates the communication of expectations, which are already difficult due to the inherent isolation of the sales job. In this situation, role ambiguity may increase as the gap increases. As a result, sales representatives may be uncertain about how to perform their various roles, or they may be unsure they are meeting the expectations of management.

Job satisfaction and organizational commitment should also benefit by a matching of the behaviors expected by the firm and those performed by the salesperson. Beyond the philosophical agreement embodied by a concordance between market and customer orientations, which should enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment, both of these latter variables have been shown to be affected by role conflict and ambiguity (e.g., Behrman and Perreault 1984; Churchill, Ford, and Walker 1976; Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970; these interrelationships are further addressed under Replication Hypotheses). Hence, an agreement of orientations should directly reduce role conflict and ambiguity, and enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment; moreover, by reducing role conflict and ambiguity, job satisfaction and organizational commitment should also be indirectly increased.

H_{10}: The smaller the difference between the market orientation of the firm and the customer orientation of the salesperson, the lower the role conflict experienced by the salesperson.

H_{11}: The smaller the difference between the market orientation of the firm and the customer orientation of the salesperson, the lower the role ambiguity experienced by the salesperson.

H_{12}: The smaller the difference between market orientation of the firm and customer orientation of the salesperson, the greater the job satisfaction of the salesperson.

H_{13}: The smaller the difference between market orientation of the firm and customer orientation of the salesperson, the greater the organizational commitment of the salesperson.

Replication Hypotheses

The primary purpose of this research has been captured in the first thirteen hypotheses. The following hypotheses summarize the remaining relationships among the job attitudes presented in the model. In essence, testing these hypothesized relationships serves to replicate the findings of previous studies involving the job attitudes and also assists in specifying the model studied here. We recognize, however, that interrelationships other than those depicted in the model may exist among these variables. For example, there is certainly a relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment; however, the direction of causality is still at issue (see Vandenberg and Lance 1992). To avoid devoting undue attention to the controversies surrounding the more equivocal relationships, we constrain our attention to the more established attitudinal relationships.

Job satisfaction is enhanced by positive affective responses toward components of the work situation (Smith, Kendall, and Hulin 1969). It has generally been argued that both role conflict and role ambiguity negatively affect job satisfaction (e.g. Behrman and Perreault 1984; Churchill, Ford, and Walker 1976; Dubinsky and Mattson 1979; Fry et al. 1986; Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman 1970). Other researchers, however, have found only one component of role perceptions (conflict or ambiguity) to be related to job satisfaction (Hoffman and Ingram 1991; Johnston et al. 1990; Lysonski, Singer, and Wilemon 1988; and Teas 1983). Although there are differing views presented in the literature, we concur with Behrman and Perreault (1984) who observed that the weight of the evidence supports the belief that role conflict and role ambiguity will result in increased job dissatisfaction.

H_{14a}: The greater the perception of role conflict, the lower the job satisfaction.

H_{14b}: The greater the perception of role ambiguity, the lower the job satisfaction.

Organizational commitment has commonly been defined as a perceived alliance between the individual and the firm that is characterized by employee involvement, effort, and loyalty to the organization (cf. Morris and Sherman 1981; Porter et al. 1974). Johnston et al. (1990) concluded that role ambiguity was directly and negatively associated with organizational commitment, while role conflict was only indirectly related to organizational commitment. Others proposed that both role ambiguity and role conflict were negatively related to organizational commitment (DeCotiis and Summers 1987; Feldman 1981; Michaels et al. 1988). While some inconsistent findings exist, our model is specified to test the latter logic with the hypotheses that both role conflict and role ambiguity negatively influence organizational commitment.

H_{15a}: The greater the perception of role conflict, the lower the organizational commitment.

H_{15b}: The greater the perception of role ambiguity, the lower the organizational commitment.

METHODOLOGY

Construct Measurement

All variables included in this study were measured on multiple-item scales drawn from previous research. The correlation matrix for the measures is presented in Table 1. Summed-scores of each construct were utilized in the statistical analysis. Customer orientation was measured using the SOCO scale developed by Saxe and Weitz (1982). Job satisfaction was measured by the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) developed by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969), and organizational commitment was measured using the Organizational

Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Porter et al. (1974). Role conflict and role ambiguity were measured using the role perception scales developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). The scale used to measure market orientation (MO) was developed by Narver and Slater (1990). The properties of this scale have only been reported in the Narver and Slater study; however, analyses of reliability and validity were found to be satisfactory.

--Insert Table 1--

As previously explained, DIFF refers to the degree of difference between orientations of the selling firm (MO) and the salesperson (SOCO). The difference is calculated as the absolute difference between the standardized market orientation score and the standardized SOCO score.

Sample and Data Collection Procedures

All constructs were measured from the salesperson's perspective using a self-report mail questionnaire. Because the study focuses on the effects of market orientation on the salesperson's behavior and attitudes, the salesperson's perception of the firm's orientation is a relevant way to measure this construct. The sampling frame consisted of salesforces of United States firms listed in the Association for Information and Image Management membership roster. Since the roster listed salesforce members for some firms and only salesforce managers for others, the following approach was used to reach salespeople.

Questionnaires were distributed to 585 randomly selected sales personnel of 241 companies involved in the sale of document imaging supplies, equipment, and services. Additionally, questionnaires were distributed randomly to 353 sales/marketing managers representing over 245 companies in the same industry. A cover letter was sent to the sales managers of each of these companies explaining the study and requesting that the sales managers distribute questionnaires to three of their salespeople. A total of 1,644 questionnaires were mailed. A second copy of the questionnaire and a follow-up letter encouraging participation were mailed to those sample members not responding within four weeks after the initial mailing; similarly, additional questionnaires were sent to the sales/marketing managers with a second request for distribution to the same three salespeople.

The two mailings produced 306 responses of which only 278 were usable due to missing values; hence, a response rate of 16.9 percent was obtained. In order to detect possible problems with nonresponse error, the data set was divided into quartiles based on the timing of receipt of the questionnaire. The first quartile was drawn from the earliest responses obtained from the first mailout, the fourth quartile consisted of the latest responses, which were all received after the second mailout (Armstrong and Overton 1977). T-tests between the cases in the first quartile and fourth quartile indicated no statistically significant differences existed in the mean responses on any variable.

Salesperson Characteristics

It is important to highlight that the respondents as a group were highly customer-oriented. The mean SOCO score is 7.7 on a 9-point scale (Table 1), with nearly all subjects at the midpoint or above; indeed, a sole subject was below the midpoint (at 4.8), while only five others fell between 5 and 6 on the 9-point scale (9 = highly customer-oriented), resulting in all but these six respondents reporting a seven or above. With regard to salesperson views of their firms' market orientation, the mean response was 4.74 (on a 7-point scale with 7 indicating highly market-oriented); therefore, the firms were viewed as being "somewhat" market-oriented. The mean responses of the remaining constructs are presented in Table 1.

Concerning subject characteristics, 19 percent of the respondents were female and 81 percent were male. In general, the respondents were well educated (71.5 percent were college graduates), mature (average age = 40.8 years), experienced (selling experience = 14.2 years), and stable in their work history (average tenure = 7.2 years).

Measurement Issues

Reliability of Measures. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) for all the measures exceeded 0.8 (Table 1), well above the recommended standard of 0.7 that has been suggested by Nunnally (1978). It is important to note that while the reliability of the difference score could not be calculated (we used a summed score yielding a single indicant for each construct), it would be lower than the reliabilities of its two components--market orientation and customer orientation (Peter, Churchill, and Brown 1993).

Model Estimation. Ordinary least squares regression was used to test our hypothesized relationships[1]; estimated coefficients and other results are presented in Table 2. The proposed model in Figure 1 posits the following five equations:

1. CO = MO + error
2. RC = MO + CO + DIFF + error
3. RA = MO + CO + DIFF + error
4. JS = MO + CO + DIFF + RA + RC + error
5. OC = MO + CO + DIFF + RA + RC + error

CO = Customer Orientation
MO = Market Orientation
RC = Role Conflict

RA = Role Ambiguity
JS = Job Satisfaction
OC = Organizational Commitment
DIFF = Difference between Market Orientation and Customer Orientation

--Insert Table 2--

RESULTS

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that (1) the market orientation of the firm significantly influences the customer orientation of the salesperson and each of the job attitudes in the directions hypothesized, (2) the customer orientation of the salesperson is unrelated to the job attitudes, and (3) the difference between the market orientation of the firm and the customer orientation of the salesperson marginally influences only role conflict in the direction hypothesized. We provide the details of these findings below.

Hypothesis 1 stated that as the market orientation of the firm increases, the customer orientation of the salesperson increases, which was supported ($b = .17$, $df = 1, 276$, $t = 2.886$, $p = .0042$). Hypotheses 2 and 3 stated that as the market orientation of the firm increases, role conflict and ambiguity for the salesperson, respectively, decreases, which were supported (H_2: $b = -.33$, $df = 3, 274$, $t = -5.393$, $p = .0000$; H_3: $b = -.53$, $df = 3, 274$, $t = -9.421$, $p = .0000$). Hypotheses 4 and 5 predicted that as the market orientation of the firm increases, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, respectively, increases, which were supported (H_4: $b = .43$, $df = 5, 272$, $t = 7.916$, $p = .0000$; H_5: $b = .50$, $df = 5, 272$, $t = 8.919$, $p = .0000$).

Hypotheses 6 and 7 proposed that as the customer orientation of the salesperson increases, role conflict and ambiguity, respectively, decreases, which were not supported (H_6:

b = -.01, df = 3, 274, t = -.131 , p = .8959; H_7: b = -.05, df = 3, 274, t = -.856, p = .3927). Hypotheses 8 and 9 predicted that as the customer orientation of the salesperson increases, there would be a corresponding increase in job satisfaction and organizational commitment, respectively. These propositions were not supported (H_8: b = .02, df = 5, 272, t = .532, p = .5948; H_9: b = .07, df = 5, 272 t = 1.486, p = .1385).

Hypothesis 10 stated that as the disparity between the firm's and salesperson's orientations increases, role conflict will increase, which was marginally supported (b = .11, df = 3, 274, t = 1.770, p = .0779). Hypothesis 11 stated that as the difference in market orientation and customer orientation increases, the role ambiguity of the salesperson will increase, which was not supported (b = -.02, df = 3, 274, t = -.341, p = .7332). Hypotheses 12 and 13 stated that as the difference between the firm and salesperson orientation increases, job satisfaction and organizational commitment will decrease, which were not supported (H_{12}: b = -.06, df = 5, 272, t = -1.209 p = .2278; H_{13}: b = -.01, df = 5, 272, t = -.138, p = .8903).

Replication Tests. As expected, job satisfaction and organizational commitment are strongly related to role conflict and role ambiguity. Job satisfaction increases as role conflict and role ambiguity decrease, supporting Hypotheses 14a (b = -.20, df = 5, 272, t = -4.099, p = .0001) and 14b (b = -.20, df = 5, 272, t = -3.724, p = .0002). Likewise, organizational commitment is elevated as role conflict and role ambiguity are diminished, supporting Hypotheses 15a (b = -.17, df = 5, 272, t = -3.306, p = .0011) and 15b (b = -.14, df = 5, 272, t = -2.509, p = .0127).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The market orientation of the firm was found to significantly influence the job attitudes and customer orientation of the salesperson. If the firm is perceived as having a high market orientation, the salesforce practices a greater customer orientation, has reduced role stress (conflict and ambiguity), and expresses greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment. These findings regarding the effect of a market orientation support previous studies which have posited or tentatively found the organizational environment to positively affect job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and reduce role stress (cf. Jaworski and Kohli 1992; Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Walker, Churchill, and Ford 1972). Conversely, the predicted effects on job attitudes by the difference between market orientation and customer orientation were not supported (except for one weakly supported hypothesis on the effect of lower differences leading to lower role conflict); in addition, the predicted effects of customer orientation on job attitudes were not supported. We attempt to explain these seemingly inconsistent findings below.

The finding that the difference measure had no relationship with job attitudes may be due to the overwhelming influence of the firm's market orientation on the customer orientation of the salesforce. The behaviors actually engaged in by the salesperson that are measured by the SOCO scale, however, may not be indicative of those *desired* by the salesperson. For example, having the market and customer orientations in alignment was predicted to improve job attitudes, even if both were low; however, if the salesperson desires customer orientation to be high, but the firm fosters a selling orientation thereby preventing the salesperson from performing in a customer-oriented manner, role stress may be high and job satisfaction and organizational commitment low. So although a congruency in behaviors exists, the results would be opposite from those initially hypothesized. Therefore, measuring the customer orientation desired by the salesperson may be more relevant than studying the actual behaviors measured by SOCO when examining the effect of differences on job attitudes.

The effect of customer orientation on job attitudes might be affected in a similar fashion. For example, even a salesperson who scores relatively high on SOCO may be constrained from performing at an even higher desired level; hence, the behaviors measured by the SOCO scale are not reflective of desired behaviors. In this case even a salesperson with a relatively high customer orientation may possess lower than expected job attitudes. Conversely, the salesperson may be performing in a customer-oriented manner that exceeds the dictates of the firm, perhaps by ignoring selling-oriented commands or covertly working with the customer to circumvent policies that are not customer-oriented. In this case, role stress could be high and job satisfaction and organizational commitment low, despite a high SOCO score.

The existence of other market and customer orientation combinations could also add noise to the data; for example, some salespeople exist who desire a low customer and market orientation, which could affect the findings of the market, customer, and difference hypotheses. The results of the market orientation hypotheses, however, argue against this being prevalent for the current sample and past research also reports high SOCO scores by salespeople. In any case, we suggest that future research on job attitudes examine the effect of customer orientation by salespeople in light of the firm's market orientation and the level of customer orientation *desired* by salespeople.

Reducing role conflict by increasing market orientation is also an interesting result, because it may help resolve the different research findings concerning the effect of role conflict on performance. On one hand, individuals with high role stress have been found in some prior research to have lower job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Johnston et al. 1990; Lysonski, Singer, and Wilemon 1988; Michaels et al. 1988). However, other studies contend that role conflict has a positive effect upon sales performance (Behrman and Perreault 1984; Michaels, Day, and Joachimsthaler 1987). We speculate that these differing conclusions about the effect of role conflict on sales performance might be due to the differing market orientations of the firms included in these studies. That is, role conflict may lead to superior (inferior) performances in a highly selling-oriented (market-oriented) firm, where long-term customer satisfaction is not (is) of concern to the firm. In short, market orientation may be a key antecedent to consider prior to developing hypotheses about job attitudes and performance measures.

In addition to the central findings discussed above, role conflict and role ambiguity were found to negatively impact job satisfaction and organizational commitment. These relationships were consistent with the findings of some past studies (e.g., Behrman and Perreault 1984; Lysonski, Singer, and Wilemon 1988; Teas 1983), but inconsistent with aspects of others (Hamner and Tosi 1974; Johnston et al. 1990). This study provides added support for the position that role stress negatively affects job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Managerial Implications

From the salesperson's point of view, a high market orientation can be inferred to be the preferred organizational orientation. When the salesperson perceives the firm as being attentive to customer needs and satisfaction, aware of competitor strategies in order to deliver superior value, and coordinating market-related activities throughout the firm, the organization is clearly striving to support the salesforce and reduce the difficulties associated with a sales position. In turn, the salesperson is more committed to and satisfied with the job. Consequently, adopting a market orientation may be an economical decision for firms in terms of reducing costs associated with losing both employees and customers.

This study also indicates that the degree to which a firm is perceived to be market-oriented is a direct and significant factor in determining the manner in which the salesforce will behave in interactions with customers. This finding indicates that management can be very influential, through its recruitment, training, evaluation, and reward systems, in molding the orientation of its salesforce to conform to the firm's selected orientation. In other words, the firm can elect to provide the resources and motivation to encourage rather than discourage, customer-oriented selling.

It is not the purpose of this paper to advocate that all firms are necessarily better served in a sales performance sense by embracing a market-oriented philosophy. The external environment in which the organization operates will certainly affect the decision concerning the most appropriate orientation from a sales dollar standpoint. However, should a firm elect a market orientation as its orientation of choice, this study supports the position that the firm will achieve greater levels of customer-oriented selling and more positive job attitudes by salespeople.

Limitations

This study is limited by several factors which should be addressed in future research. First, the model should be further tested with other independent samples. Testing a model on a given data set "might capitalize on the peculiar characteristics of that data set" (Bagozzi and Yi 1988, p. 83). Furthermore, only one industry was included in our sampling frame. Consequently, caution is warranted regarding the generalization of our findings to other selling environments.

A number of measurement problems regarding difference scores have been noted in the literature that pertain to the DIFF variable (Peter, Churchill, and Brown 1993), which was created to study the difference between the market orientation of the firm and the customer orientation of the salesperson. The failure to support the hypotheses related to DIFF might be due to reliability, multicollinearity, and/or the variance restriction problems identified by Peter, Churchill, and Brown (1993). Following the recommendations of Peter, Churchill, and Brown, in future research the difference between the orientation desired and that existing for the organization might be measured by phrasing each item so the difference between the constructs is captured within each item.

Assessing the salesperson's perception of the orientation of the firm was the approach used to measure the market orientation construct. While appropriate since we wanted to measure the effect of the market orientation of the firm as perceived by the salesperson, in order to relate these to the salesperson's customer orientation and attitudes, using the same respondent to assess customer orientation and market orientation may result in common method variance. This shared variance, to some degree, may account for the relationship between market orientation and customer orientation.

Finally, while we conducted a cross-sectional study to examine the hypothesized relationships, some of the constructs investigated may be dynamic in nature. This could be a potential limitation as the cross-sectional data does not reflect any ongoing transformations that might affect the relationships among those variables. For example, the orientation of the firm may be moving towards a greater or lesser market orientation, but the effect on the salesperson's customer orientation and attitudes could be lagged. A longitudinal study would better capture the dynamism of these constructs.

Future Research Directions

Few studies have examined the market orientation of the firm and the customer orientation of the salesperson on salesperson performance and attitudes. Each of these variables, independently and in tandem, clearly have the potential to influence the buyer-seller relationship. While using salespeople to assess the market orientation in this study was appropriate, future research should consider having senior management assess the market orientation of the firm independently. In addition, having customers evaluate the customer orientation of the salesperson would also be desirable, since customers could provide a more definitive perspective on this measure.

Past research has shown that industrial sales representatives, as a group, tend to be customer-oriented (e.g., Michaels and Day 1985). Since our sample consisted of such salespeople (SOCO = 7.8, Table 1), our findings are limited to investigating the hypothesized effects on/of customer-oriented salespeople. To examine salespeople and organizations with orientations different from those investigated in this study, future research could identify and investigate less customer-oriented industries. One possibility is the retail sector, where sales clerks have been criticized for their general lack of a customer orientation, while their respective retail organizations have espoused the need for a greater customer orientation (e.g., Koepp 1988).

While the results of this study indicated no association between customer orientation and job attitudes, other studies have reported a significant relationship (e.g., O'Hara, Boles, and Johnston 1991). Central to this issue is the directionality of the relationships. Our study proposed customer orientation as being antecedent to job attitudes, whereas others have conceptualized customer orientation as an outcome of job attitudes (e.g., Hoffman and Ingram 1991). The causal order or interactions among these variables should be investigated in future studies, so that the relationships among the constructs can be understood. We suggest that future research also take into account the *desired* level of customer orientation by salespeople when studying the effect of salesperson customer orientation and/or firm and salesperson differences on job attitudes. This perspective might more fully illuminate any difference effects on job attitudes. Finally, taking into account firm orientation may help clarify the conflicting results of research studying the effect of variables such as role conflict on actual sales performance. Market orientation of the firm may help explain why role conflict may lead to greater sales in some instances and lesser in others.

[1]Weighted least-squares regression (WLS) was also executed as suggested by Peter, Churchill, and Brown (1993) to overcome potential problems with difference scores. The results obtained utilizing WLS were not significantly different from the findings obtained using OLS.

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Figure 1

THE EFFECTS OF ORIENTATIONS AND DIFFERENCES IN ORIENTATIONS ON JOB ATTITUDES: HYPOTHESIZED MODEL

Table 1
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND PEARSON CORRELATIONS

	Mean	Std. Dev.	No.of Scale Items	Alpha	MO	CO	DIFF	RC	RA	JS	OC
Market Orientation	4.74	.963	15	.88		.171 (.004)	-.391 (.000)	-.372 (.000)	-.526 (.000)	.637 (.000)	.645 (.000)
Customer Orientation	7.810	.679	24	.86			-.341 (.000)	-.102 (.090)	-.130 (.030)	.165 (.006)	.192 (.001)
DIFF	.997	.802	N/A	N/A				.243 (.000)	.201 (.001)	-.325 (.000)	-.293 (.000)
Role Conflict	3.655	1.307	8	.82					.442 (.000)	-.466 (.000)	-.420 (.000)
Role Ambiguity	2.867	1.128	6	.81						-.529 (.000)	-.482 (.000)
Job Satisfaction	2.196	.415	72	.90							.633 (.000)
Organizational Commitment	4.924	1.047	15	.88							

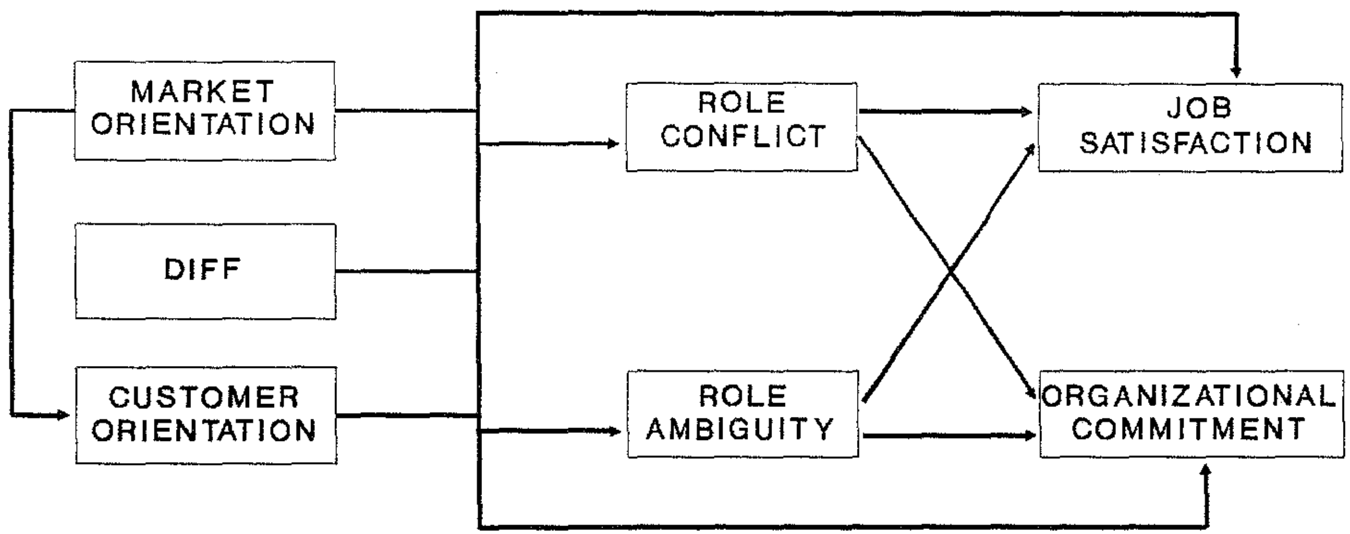
DIFF = standardized market orientation score less standardized SOCO score.
P-values are shown in parentheses

Table 2
RESULTS OF ORDINARY LEAST SQUARE REGRESSIONS
(STANDARDIZED REGRESSION WEIGHTS)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variables CO[1] Beta (t-value)	RC[2] Beta (t-value)	RA[3] Beta (t-value)	JS4 Beta (t-value)	OC[5] Beta (t-value)
Market Orientation of the Firm	.17[b] (2.886)	-.33[a] (-5.393)	-.53[a] (-9.421)	.43[a] (7.916)	.50[a] (8.919)
Customer Orientation of the Salesperson	----	-.01 (-.131)	-.05 (-.856)	.02 (.532)	.07 (1.486)
Difference	----	.11[d] (1.770)	-.02 (-.341)	-.06 (-1.209)	-.01 (-.138)
Role Conflict	----	----	----	-.20[a] (-4.099)	-.17[b] (-3.306)
Role Ambiguity	----	----	----	-.20[a] (-3.724)	-.14[c] (-2.509)
R^2	.03	.14	.28	.49	.46

[a]$p < 0.001$
[b]$p < 0.01$
[c]$p < 0.05$
[d]$p < 0.10$

[1] CO = Customer Orientation
[2] RC = Role Conflict
[3] RA = Role Ambiguity
[4] J S = Job Satisfaction
[5] OC = Organizational Commitment



DIFF-MARKET ORIENTATION - CUSTOMER ORIENTATION