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Effects of sales force market orientation on creativity, innovation implementation, and sales performance

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ABSTRACT

Market orientation (MO) lies at the very heart of modern marketing thinking and practice. Although research has shown that MO contributes to firm performance through innovation, an understanding is lacking on how the dimensions of MO (customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination) may have differential effects on innovation, especially in the sales force context. Using data from business to business sales forces in the US manufacturing sector, this study identifies sales force outcome interdependence as a critical boundary condition that can strengthen the positive effect of competitor orientation but weaken the positive effect of customer orientation on sales force creativity. Moreover, results indicate that effect of sales force creativity on performance is fully mediated by innovation implementation, which can be bolstered by an innovative organizational culture.

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1. Introduction

Market orientation (MO), which guides firms to achieve superior performance through creating customer values, lies at the very heart of modern marketing thinking and practice (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). While MO in the aggregate has repeatedly been shown to enhance firm performance, a meta-analysis fails to reveal substantive moderators (e.g., environmental turbulence) on the MO–performance linkage (Kirca, Jayachandran, & Bearden, 2005). However, because MO is composed of multiple dimensions (e.g., customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interfunctional coordination) and firms have the strategic option to emphasize certain MO dimensions (Narver & Slater, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1994), a relevant question is whether the relationships between the MO dimensions and performance are moderated by contextual factors; that is, what boundary conditions can render some MO dimensions more important than others?

MO is frequently linked to performance through its effect on firm innovativeness (Han, Kim, & Srivastava, 1998; Kirca et al., 2005). Although innovation is often conveniently attributed to the R&D function, increasingly there is recognition of the importance of product and business process innovations that occur outside of the R&D department in the interstice of different functional areas (Wiersema, 2012). The sales force, for example, is in an enviable position of accessing first-

hand customer and competitor intelligence, and can contribute substantially to the firm's innovation process (Evans, McFarland, Dietz, & Jaramillo, 2012). Indeed, Judson, Schoenbachler, Gordon, Ridnour, and Weilbaker (2006) and Joshi (2010) demonstrate that salespeople can have direct input in the product innovation processes. Yet, little research exists that examines how sales force MO contributes to the firm's innovation process, which, accordingly, is the focus of this study.

While innovation is a key mediating variable between MO and performance (Kirca et al., 2005), studies attempting to understand MO–innovation–performance relationships at the dimensional level have produced mixed results (Deshpande, Farley, & Webster, 1993; Han et al., 1998; Hurley & Hult, 1998; Im & Workman, 2004). These results suggest that the relationship between sales force MO and creativity/innovation is likely to be contingent upon the specific behavioral dimensions of MO as well as contextual moderators.

A prominent recent trend in sales management is the changing nature of selling tasks, wherein salespeople in the same unit often need to depend on one another for successfully accomplishing their selling tasks (Ahearne, Rapp, Hughes, & Jindal, 2010; Yilmaz & Hunt, 2001). Against this backdrop, this study contends that a potential set of moderators on the relationship of sales force MO and creativity is task interdependence and outcome interdependence. Task interdependence describes the extent to which salespeople within the same unit rely on each other's knowledge and skills to perform their tasks effectively, whereas outcome interdependence is the degree to which a salesperson's responsibilities, evaluations, and compensation are directly tied to the sales unit's performance

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(Menguc, Auh, & Uslu, 2013). Our research framework (Fig. 1) investigates the extent to which these structural factors moderate the relative effects of customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination on sales force creativity (Narver & Slater, 1990).

In so doing, we also attempt to address two shortcomings of the extant research on creativity/innovation in the marketing literature. First, it is well established that innovation is a two-stage process that involves creativity (idea generation) and implementation (George, 2007; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2013), yet no studies have incorporated both stages in relation to MO, as some investigated creativity while the majority focused on implementation. Second, few empirical studies have explored the moderating role of internal task environment, although research in other fields has demonstrated the critical role of situational variables in the creativity and implementation processes (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2013). This study, therefore, examines both stages of sales force innovation and explores their boundary conditions.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Market orientation

Market orientation has been a topic of intense interest in the marketing literature. Current understanding of MO is largely based on the conceptualizations of Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990). Kohli and Jaworski (1990) define MO as the organization-wide information generation, dissemination, and efficient responses to current and future customer needs and preferences. Narver and Slater (1990) identify three behavioral orientations—customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination—as key components of MO. Customer orientation refers to the sufficient understanding of the target buyers' imminent and latent needs for superior value creation; competitor orientation captures short- and long-term strengths, weaknesses, capabilities, and strategies of key competitors; inter-functional coordination is the coordinated integration of resources across functional groups in meeting customers' needs.

Both Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990) conceptualize MO as a behavior, but measurements of Narver and Slater's MO are adopted in this study based on two considerations. First, the

essence of market intelligence in Kohli and Jaworski (1990) is well ingrained in Narver and Slater's (1990) conceptual framework. Second, it is the dimensional effects of customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination that have mixed effects in the literature and deserve further exploration. Therefore, this study investigates the effects of these three specific market-oriented behaviors of the sales force, as opposed to the overall organization-wide MO, which is consistent with the majority of extant research on MO, innovation, and firm performance (Han et al., 1998; Im & Workman, 2004; Zhou, Brown, Dev, & Agarwal, 2007).

While antecedents of MO have been well established, MO does not always appear to have a positive impact on performance (Kirca et al., 2005). That is, conditions under which MO is a more effective predictor of performance have yet to be further examined. This study contributes to the literature by investigating the moderated mediation process of the MO–performance relationship within the context of sales force innovation.

2.2. Sales force innovation

Innovation is the introduction and application of ideas, processes, technologies, or products that are new and useful to the organization (West & Farr, 1990). It is a process involving both the generation and implementation of creative ideas (Robertson, 1967; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Researchers agree that the innovation process involves two qualitatively different stages: creativity (or idea generation) and implementation (George, 2007; Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbek, 1973). Innovative actors (e.g., individuals, teams, and organizations) have to first recognize the need for new solutions and generate creative ideas. These ideas will then be processed critically so that promising new solutions can be implemented (Amabile et al., 1996). To be considered creative, ideas must be new and unique compared to others currently in use or available (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004), and have the potential to create additional value for the organization (George, 2007). The second stage, innovation implementation, is a process of adopting and implementing promising ideas generated in the first stage by acquiring resources, commitment, and usage from target organizational members (Klein & Sorra, 1996).

However, most research to date does not distinguish between the two stages of innovation and treats innovation either as a generic

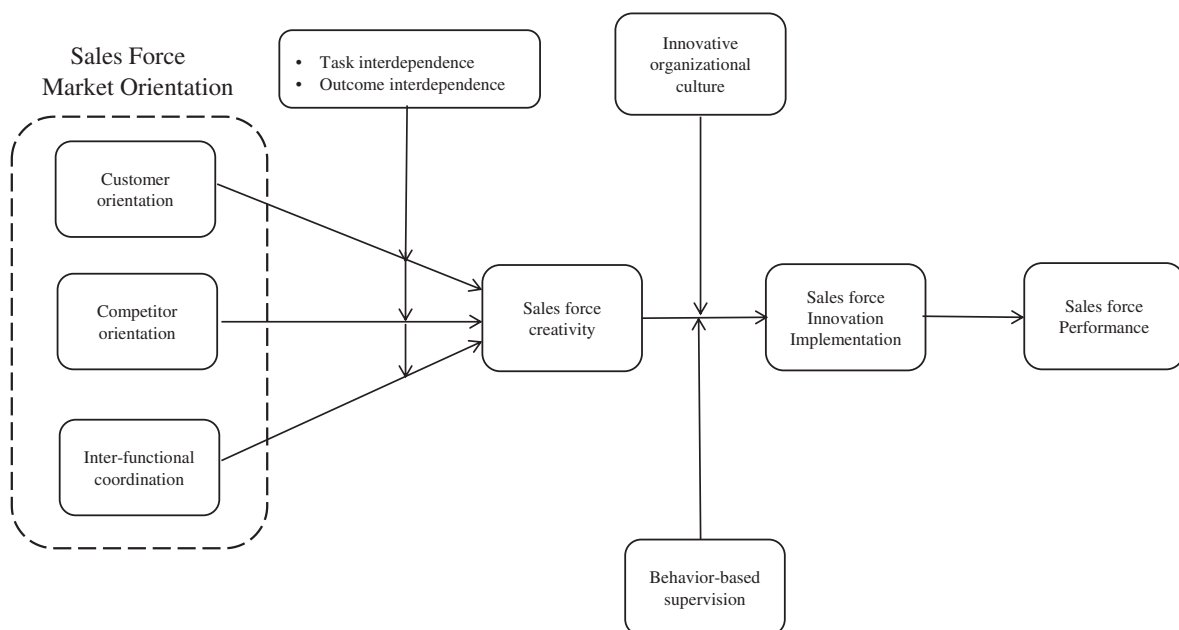


Fig. 1. Differential effects of sales force market orientation on innovation and performance.

concept or classifies it into different types (Dewar & Dutton, 1986; Han et al., 1998; Henderson & Clark, 1990; Tushman & Anderson, 1986). The distinction between the two stages of innovation is important, since they take a sequential order and have different antecedents at the individual and organizational levels (Frambach & Schillewaert, 2002; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2013). An ability to generate creative ideas may not always lead to successful implementations. For example, recent research has shown that in a team setting, creative ideas may be successfully implemented only under enabling environmental conditions such as a high level of innovative culture (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2013).

Further, the majority of research on innovation in marketing has been conducted in R&D and other related areas (Im & Workman, 2004; Moorman & Miner, 1997; Sethi, Smith, & Park, 2001), although the importance of creative marketing programs is also highlighted (Andrews & Smith, 1996; Im & Workman, 2004). While the sales force is a key player in business-to-business marketing programs, it has rarely been considered an essential part of the firm's innovation process. Not surprisingly, innovation of the sales force has seldom been a subject of serious scholarly inquiry (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004) and is recognized as an under-researched area (Evans et al., 2012). This is unfortunate, as business marketers increasingly realize the importance of the sales force in firm innovation (Judson et al., 2006; Wiersema, 2012).

3. Model hypotheses

3.1. Market orientation and sales force creativity

Consistent with the MO literature, this study expects all three dimensions of MO to be positively related to sales force creativity because they lead to generative learning and creative ideas (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1995).

Customer orientation involves collecting and analyzing customer intelligence in order to continuously create superior value for target customers. A customer orientation requires that the sales force understands the customer's entire value chain, not only as it is today but as it will evolve over time based on market and environmental dynamics (Narver & Slater, 1990). Organizations committed to superior customer value have been shown to innovate throughout their business system beyond products or services (Parsons, 1991). For the sales force, its understanding of key customers and commitment to customer satisfaction will motivate salespeople to uncover customers' current and future needs, which enable salespeople to formulate creative problem solutions.

Competitor orientation involves monitoring and understanding the strengths, weaknesses, capabilities, and strategies of both current and potential competitors (Day & Wensley, 1988; Narver & Slater, 1990). Competitor-based intelligence captures current and emerging strategies and technologies capable of satisfying the extant and expected needs of the firm's target market (Narver & Slater, 1990). Competitors' strategies are a good benchmark for more effective creation of customer value. Without sufficient intelligence about the competition, the sales force may not be able to keep up with market development and may lose key customers to competitors. A sales force that is keen on gathering competitive information and keeps abreast of competitor maneuvers is more likely to come up with creative ideas (Han et al., 1998; Im & Workman, 2004). Therefore, competitor orientation is expected to be positively related to sales force creativity.

Inter-functional coordination refers to the coordinated utilization of company resources in creating superior value for target customers (Narver & Slater, 1990). Inter-functional coordination facilitates the generation, collection, and dissemination of market intelligence that cultivates creativity, thereby encouraging novel solutions for difficult customer problems (Im & Workman, 2004). Empirical evidence from new product development research suggests that open sharing of information and ideas facilitates creative

problem solving (Andrews & Smith, 1996; Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Han et al., 1998; Im & Workman, 2004; Van de Ven, 1986). Therefore, a sales force that shares information, interacts, and coordinates with other functional areas is in a better position to generate creative ideas.

3.2. Moderating effects of outcome/task interdependence

Because the modern sales environment has shifted away from the traditional view of a "lone wolf" salesperson and calls for more coordinated efforts of salespeople within the same sales unit, the nature of the sales tasks has become more interdependent (Ahearne et al., 2010; Yilmaz & Hunt, 2001). Core task characteristics that reflect such interdependency are task interdependence and outcome interdependence (Kiggundu, 1981; Menguc et al., 2013; Yilmaz & Hunt, 2001).

Salespeople in the same unit bring together diverse levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities to interpret customer- and competitor-based intelligence (Venkatesh, Challagalla, & Kohli, 2001). Task interdependence is an important means of generating superordinate goals, which can help foster salespeople's identification with other members due to stronger social ties (Menguc et al., 2013). As such, task interdependence can encourage knowledge combination among salespeople through cooperative behaviors such as communication, helping, and information sharing. Similarly, outcome interdependence provides strong incentives for within-unit cooperation as interdependent outcomes enhance perceived stakes in the success of the sales unit (Menguc et al., 2013; Yilmaz & Hunt, 2001). Research suggests that when diverse sources of market intelligence are shared and analyzed with peer salespeople, the sales unit will display greater creativity (Venkatesh et al., 2001). Salespeople who are customer- and competitor-oriented will be able to take advantage of the rich information and knowledge generated, shared, and reconfigured in such an environment (Menguc et al., 2013). Therefore, task interdependence and outcome interdependence may enhance the positive effects of both customer orientation and competitor orientation on sales force creativity.

H1. The positive relationship between customer orientation and sales force creativity is stronger when (a) task interdependence is higher and (b) outcome interdependence is higher.

H2. The positive relationship between competitor orientation and sales force creativity is stronger when (a) task interdependence is higher and (b) outcome interdependence is higher.

In contrast, task interdependence and outcome interdependence may weaken the relationship between inter-functional coordination and creativity. Inter-functional coordination is a type of collaboration between functional units that requires salespeople to work closely with colleagues from other departments, a process through which different ideas and proposals will be exchanged, evaluated, and acted on, leading to greater creativity (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). Task interdependence and outcome interdependence induce collaboration within the sales unit, wherein salespeople actively share information and knowledge with colleagues in their own unit. Since the within-unit collaborations may involve intelligence learned from the between-unit collaborations and vice versa, overlaps and redundancies in knowledge, information, and ideas can occur when both intra- and inter-unit collaborative processes are in place. Task/outcome interdependence and inter-functional coordination can therefore be considered substitutes to some degree in disseminating market intelligence and generating problem solutions.

H3. The positive relationship between inter-functional coordination and sales force creativity is weaker when (a) task interdependence is higher and (b) outcome interdependence is higher.

3.3. Creativity, innovation implementation, and task environment

Creativity does not always lend itself to effective implementation (Amabile et al., 1996; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2013). In other words, creativity is a necessary but insufficient condition for successful implementation. Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2013) suggest that team creativity and creative environment work together to affect innovation implementation. In particular, they investigate the moderating role of climate for innovation in the creativity-implementation relationship and find that the relationship is positive only under high levels of climate for innovation. This is consistent with other researchers' argument that implementation effectiveness is contingent upon contextual factors such as innovative organizational culture and the fit between innovation and organizational value (Klein & Sorra, 1996).

This study investigates two contextual variables in the creativity-implementation relationship: innovative organizational culture and behavior-based supervision. Innovative organizational culture refers to the firm's orientation and general openness to changes and new ideas as perceived by the sales force (Hurley & Hult, 1998). An innovative culture is characterized by organization-wide learning, participative decision making, support and collaboration, and power sharing (Hurley & Hult, 1998). Because an innovative culture values flexibility, shows a willingness to find and implement novel solutions, appreciates unconventional ideas, and ritualizes innovation events (Stock, Six, & Zacharias, 2013), such culture facilitates acceptance of creative ideas across functional areas, and ensures adequate allocation of resources needed for successful implementation. As such, creative ideas will more likely be successfully implemented by sales units within a highly innovative organizational culture.

H4. The positive relationship between creativity and implementation is stronger when the sales organization operates in a more innovative organizational culture.

An important element of sales force management is the sales force control system, which refers to the formalized policies, rules, and procedures to direct and supervise salespeople for desired organizational outcomes (Anderson & Oliver, 1987). Anderson and Oliver (1987) conceptualize behavior- and outcome-based control philosophies. Behavior-based control entails intensive management involvement in directing, training, evaluating and rewarding salespeople according to their input in the selling process (e.g., number of new customers visited) rather than their immediate output (e.g., sales volume). In contrast, outcome-based control rewards salespeople on the basis of their output, or immediate sales performance, with little management intervention during the selling process. While behavior-based control renders the manager more control in the sales process (Anderson & Oliver, 1987), such practice can also bring about negative consequences (Miao & Evans, 2013; Wang, Dou, & Zhou, 2012). Specifically, because behavior control requires salespeople to strictly follow prescribed steps and procedures, such control style may not only dampen salespeople's intrinsic motivation but also reduce salespeople's flexibility in selling situations that call for adaptive implementations. When salespeople are under a high level of behavior-based supervision, for example, it would be difficult for them to deviate from prescribed procedures even if an innovative course of action is necessary. Therefore, behavior-based supervision may weaken the positive relationship of creativity and implementation.

H5. The positive relationship between creativity and implementation is weaker when the sales organization employs a higher level of behavior-based supervision.

Innovation is a major source of the firm's competitive advantage. Effective implementation of innovative ideas creates market positional advantages through product and/or service differentiations and process improvement, which, in turn, lead to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and

improved firm performance (Andrews & Smith, 1996; Song & Montoya-Weiss, 2001). As the firm continues to implement innovations, it accumulates knowledge and experience in a dynamic fashion. Therefore, effective implementation of innovation will over time become an intangible dynamic resource that is valuable, rare, and hard to copy, which should lead to the firm's long-term superior performance (Barney, 1991; Lawson & Samson, 2001; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). Therefore, innovation implementation should be positively related to sales force performance.

4. Methodology

4.1. Sample and data collection

The unit of analysis for this study is the sales force, which is the sales unit or department within an organization. We acquired a commercial email list of 2000 sales managers and/or vice presidents of sales in the US manufacturing sector (NAICS 31-33). We requested their participation in the survey with an initial email invitation that offered a summary research report as an incentive. A total of 102 addresses were undeliverable (including 23 managers who were no longer with the same employers). We received acquiescence from 269 sales managers, to whom we emailed the link to the online survey on SurveyMonkey.com. After two follow-up email reminders, we received 153 responses, with an effective response rate of 56.9%.

The firms in the sample represent various industries in the manufacturing sector including food and beverage (10 firms), paper, packaging, and printing (17), chemicals and plastics (28), metal and metal tools (16), machinery and equipment (20), computer and electronics (15), measurement instruments and apparatuses (6), automobile and transportation equipment (7), furniture (4), and others (30). The mean and median sales in 2012 were \$3.1 billion and \$12.2 million, respectively, whereas the mean and median numbers of employees were 5700 and 125, respectively. The size of the sales force ranged from 2 to 2000, with a mean of 72 and a median of 14 salespeople.

Non-response bias was assessed by comparing the mean responses on key constructs from early respondents (received prior to the reminders) and late respondents (received after the reminder emails) (Armstrong & Overton, 1977), and no significant differences in any of the model constructs were found. We also compared the size of the responding and non-responding firms (number of employees and annual sales), and did not find significant differences. Therefore, non-response bias does not seem to be a serious concern in this study.

4.2. Measures

Market orientation was measured with the scale developed by Narver and Slater (1990), which consists of customer orientation (5 items), competitor orientation (4 items), and inter-functional coordination (4 items). Sales force creativity was measured with five items adapted from Wang and Netemeyer's (2004) salesperson creativity scale.

We developed the measure for sales force innovation implementation based on our conceptual definition, literature review, and personal interviews and discussions with a small group of sales managers. A total of 20 new items were generated by the researchers, reviewed by three marketing professors with significant research expertise in sales, and pretested to a group of 23 sales managers for content validity. The final scale consists of nine items that assess the extent to which the creative ideas generated by the sales force are implemented in the firm to create, communicate, and deliver superior customer value.

Task interdependence and outcome interdependence were each measured with three items adapted from Menguc et al. (2013), and innovative organizational culture was measured with three items adapted from Hurley and Hult (1998). For behavior-based supervision, we used a three-item scale from Oliver and Anderson (1994).

Sales performance was assessed by three items from the sales force effectiveness scale (Baldauf, Cravens, & Piercy, 2001). Subjective measures of performance are commonly used in research involving private companies and SBUs of large companies (Narver & Slater, 1990). Prior research has found a strong correlation between subjective performance assessments and their objective counterparts (Dess & Robinson, 1984; Pearce, Robins, & Robinson, 1987).

The empirical model also considers three control variables. Specifically, three environmental variables including market dynamism (two items), technological turbulence (four items), and competitive intensity (four items) may have an impact on creativity, implementation, and performance. These scales are adapted from Jaworski and Kohli (1993). All scale items are presented in the Appendix A.

5. Analysis and results

5.1. Measurement model

A measurement model was estimated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in EQS 6.1 to assess the psychometric properties of the multi-item constructs in the study. The measurement model demonstrates an acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{(1196)} = 1662.4, p < .01; NFI = .900, NNFI = .966, CFI = .970, SRMR = .063, RMSEA = .052$). In particular, all item loadings are large, positive, and significant ($p < .01$), demonstrating convergent validity (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) by each construct is greater than its shared variance with all the other constructs, in support of discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the data.

5.2. Hypothesis testing

This study employed hierarchical regressions to test our conceptual model. All independent and moderator variables were mean-centered before interactive terms were created. In each hierarchical regression model, control variables were entered first, followed by direct effects, and finally the interactions.

The first regression model examines the moderating role of task interdependence (Table 2). The direct effects of MO dimensions, though not formally hypothesized, all turn out to be statistically significant. Customer orientation ($\beta = .30, p < .01$), competitor orientation ($\beta = .21, p < .01$), and inter-functional coordination ($\beta = .27, p < .01$) are positively associated with creativity. However, none of the interactive terms is significant, although they are in the predicted directions. Specifically, task interdependence does not moderate the effect of customer orientation ($\beta = .03, ns$), competitor orientation ($\beta = .10, ns$), or inter-functional coordination ($\beta = -.07, ns$). Therefore, H1a, H2a, and H3a are not supported.

Table 2
Moderation effects of task interdependence on creativity.

	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 3 (β)
<i>Control variables</i>			
Market dynamism	.09	.02	.02
Technological turbulence	.06	.00	-.01
Competitive intensity	-.00	.01	.01
<i>Direct effects</i>			
Customer orientation (CUSTOR)		.28**	.30**
Competitor orientation (COMPOR)		.22**	.21**
Interfunctional coordination (INTERFUNC)		.26**	.27**
Task interdependence (TASKINTER)		.04	.04
<i>Interactions</i>			
CUSTOR \times TASKINTER			.03
COMPOR \times TASKINTER			.10
INTERFUNC \times TASKINTER			-.07
R2	.02	.39	.40
$\Delta R2$	-	.37**	.01
F-statistic	.73	13.43**	9.55**
d.f.	3	7	10

** $p < .01$.

When outcome interdependence is examined as a moderator, the direct effects of MO dimensions remain positive and significant (Table 3): customer orientation ($\beta = .30, p < .01$), competitor orientation ($\beta = .19, p < .05$), and inter-functional coordination ($\beta = .27, p < .01$) are positively related to creativity. Furthermore, outcome interdependence strengthens the positive effect of competitor orientation ($\beta = .25, p < .01$) but, surprisingly, weakens the effect of customer orientation ($\beta = -.20, p < .05$), which is opposite of the predicted direction. The interaction of outcome interdependence and inter-functional coordination is not significant ($\beta = .01, ns$). These results support H2b, but H1b and H3b are rejected.

To facilitate interpretation of the significant interactions, Fig. 2 plots the simple slope graphs using unstandardized regression coefficients with high (one standard deviation above the mean) and low (one standard deviation below the mean) values of the moderators. Fig. 2 (panel A) shows that customer orientation has a positive relationship with creativity when outcome interdependence is low; when outcome interdependence is high, customer orientation has a negative association with creativity. While counter to our expectation, this finding is interesting and managerially important, which will be explored in the discussion section. Fig. 2 (panel B) illustrates that competitor orientation has a positive effect on creativity across high and low levels of outcome interdependence, but such effect is much stronger when outcome interdependence is high.

The third regression model tests H4 and H5. Table 4 reports that innovative organizational culture has a marginally significant interactive

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of latent constructs.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Customer orientation	5.86	1.01	1.00												
2. Competitor orientation	5.22	1.26	.64**	1.00											
3. Inter-functional coordination	5.08	1.24	.52**	.40**	1.00										
4. Creativity	4.87	1.17	.55**	.50**	.49**	1.00									
5. Implementation	4.66	1.22	.56**	.44**	.63**	.77**	1.00								
6. Sales performance	4.79	1.11	.33**	.25**	.29**	.23**	.33**	1.00							
7. Task interdependence	5.10	1.38	.11	.01	.15	.11	.11	-.02	1.00						
8. Outcome interdependence	3.49	1.53	.14	.02	.10	-.03	.11	.01	.34**	1.00					
9. Innovative culture	5.25	1.23	.45**	.38**	.33**	.34**	.32**	.21**	.06	.06	1.00				
10. Behavior-based supervision	5.28	.98	.44**	.42**	.31**	.37**	.41**	.24**	.10	.04	.28**	1.00			
11. Market dynamism	4.31	1.54	.14	.04	.22**	.17*	.21**	.09	.10	.07	.12	.15	1.00		
12. Technological turbulence	4.79	1.36	.17*	.11	.16	.17*	.14	.12	.11	.13	.33**	.16*	.32**	1.00	
13. Competitive intensity	4.54	1.31	.02	.03	-.03	.02	-.03	-.12	.05	-.04	.02	.07	.19*	.16	1.00

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 3
Moderation effects of outcome interdependence on creativity.

	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 3 (β)
<i>Control variables</i>			
Market dynamism	.09	.02	.02
Technological turbulence	.06	.02	.02
Competitive intensity	−.00	.01	.01
<i>Direct effects</i>			
Customer orientation (CUSTOR)		.30**	.30**
Competitor orientation (COMPOR)		.20**	.19*
Interfunctional coordination (INTERFUNC)		.26**	.27**
Outcome interdependence (OUTINTER)		−.10	−.10
<i>Interactions</i>			
CUSTOR \times OUTINTER			−.20*
COMPOR \times OUTINTER			.25**
INTERFUNC \times OUTINTER			.01
R2	.02	.40	.43
Δ R2	–	.38**	.03
F-statistic	.73	13.88**	10.76**
d.f.	3	7	10

$p < .10$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

effect with creativity ($\beta = .08, p < .10$). Fig. 2 (panel C) shows that creativity has a stronger positive relationship with innovation implementation when there is a high level of innovative organizational culture. Finally, behavior-based supervision is not found to have a significant interaction with creativity, although in the predicted direction ($\beta = -.07, ns$). H4 is supported, but H5 is rejected.

Finally, a mediation test was performed to investigate the relative impact of creativity vis-à-vis innovation implementation on sales performance. It is found that: (1) creativity has a positive direct effect on performance ($\beta = .23, p < .01$), (2) creativity has a positive effect on implementation ($\beta = .77, p < .01$), (3) implementation has a positive effect on sales performance ($\beta = .33, p < .01$), and (4) when both creativity and implementation are entered, effect of creativity on performance becomes non-significant ($\beta = -.05, ns$), but the effect of implementation on sales performance is significant ($\beta = .37, p < .01$). The mediation test reveals that innovation implementation fully mediates the effect of creativity on sales performance, which corroborates our argument that innovation research should investigate these two qualitatively distinct stages separately.

6. Discussion

6.1. Theoretical implications

MO is a cornerstone of modern marketing management philosophy and has received a considerable amount of academic investigation in the past two decades (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). Indeed, a meta-analysis confirms the positive impact of MO on firm performance because it enhances firm innovativeness (Kirca et al., 2005). However, Kirca et al. (2005) did not find any substantive moderators on the MO-performance relationship using the aggregate measure of MO. Given that the three dimensions of MO (i.e., customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination) may not have equal effects on innovation and subsequent performance (Narver & Slater, 1990), this study explores the possible boundary conditions for the dimensional effects of sales force MO.

This study makes three notable theoretical contributions. First, while confirming prior research findings that MO is linked to performance through innovation, the study demonstrates that the effects of two dimensions of MO—customer orientation and competitor orientation—on sales innovation are differentially contingent upon the task environment. Although task interdependence does not have any moderation

effects, it appears that outcome interdependence can amplify the positive effect of competitor orientation on sales force creativity. Because a significant amount of competitor-related information and knowledge may reside in individual salespeople and outcome interdependence encourages interaction, discussion, interpretation, and joint problem solving within the sales force, competitor intelligence will more likely be processed in a timely fashion leading to a stronger positive effect on sales force creativity.

Contrary to our expectation, outcome interdependence undermines the positive effect of customer orientation on creativity. While other explanations are possible, one plausible conjecture for this result involves the difference between customer and competitor intelligence. Competitor intelligence is often more straightforward, short-lived, and requires quick actions to preempt competitors given information of what they are doing or planning to do. Moreover, innovation based on competitor intelligence is more likely incremental than radical and tends to focus more on achieving a cost advantage than differentiation (Changdy & Tellis, 2000; Slater & Narver, 1994). Therefore, perceived time pressure induced by outcome interdependence will likely motivate salespeople to more efficiently process competitor information and steer courses of action quickly for incremental innovation. In contrast, customer intelligence is less straightforward than competitor intelligence, which requires more time for in-depth interpretation and analysis. Outcome interdependence can discourage salespeople from spending time necessary for fully diagnosing customer latent needs that are not so obvious, because it may slow down the accomplishment of the entire sales unit and jeopardize its immediate outcome performance. As such, outcome interdependence may weaken the positive effect of customer orientation on sales force creativity.

While the main effects of customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination on creativity are of a comparable magnitude, which are consistent with prior research (Narver & Slater, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1994), it is when the selling task is highly outcome interdependent that competitor orientation becomes particularly important for generating creative ideas relative to customer orientation. These findings challenge scholars who argue that customer orientation is the most fundamental aspect of MO (Rohit Deshpande & Farley, 1998; Rohit Deshpande et al., 1993). However, our results do not imply that customer orientation is not important, but reveal the relative effectiveness of customer orientation under certain circumstances (Day & Wensley, 1988; Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Voss & Voss, 2000) such as the level of outcome interdependence in the sales unit. This echoes Han et al.'s (1998) comment that firms hoping to enhance performance through innovation should allocate resources disproportionately to the MO component that is most effective in a given condition.

Second, this study contributes to the innovation literature as well as sales research by demonstrating that it is necessary to distinguish between creativity and implementation as two distinct steps when investigating sales force innovation. MO impacts sales innovation mainly through its direct effect on creativity. While creativity is positively related to implementation, such association becomes stronger in a highly innovative organizational culture. Prior research on organizational culture suggests that employees will be motivated to actively engage in activities that get emphasized, supported, and rewarded in the workplace (Schneider, 1990; Wang & Ma, 2013). When the sales organization emphasizes and values innovation, salespeople will more likely act on the creative ideas generated during the selling process because implementing creativity is consistent with organizational expectations and its reward systems. Furthermore, the effect of creativity on sales performance is not direct but is entirely mediated by successful implementation of creative ideas. Future research is advised to explicitly account for creativity and implementation as two distinct steps.

Third, this study demonstrates the relevance of creativity and implementation to the sales organization's effectiveness and performance. The sales function is not typically recognized as a source for creativity

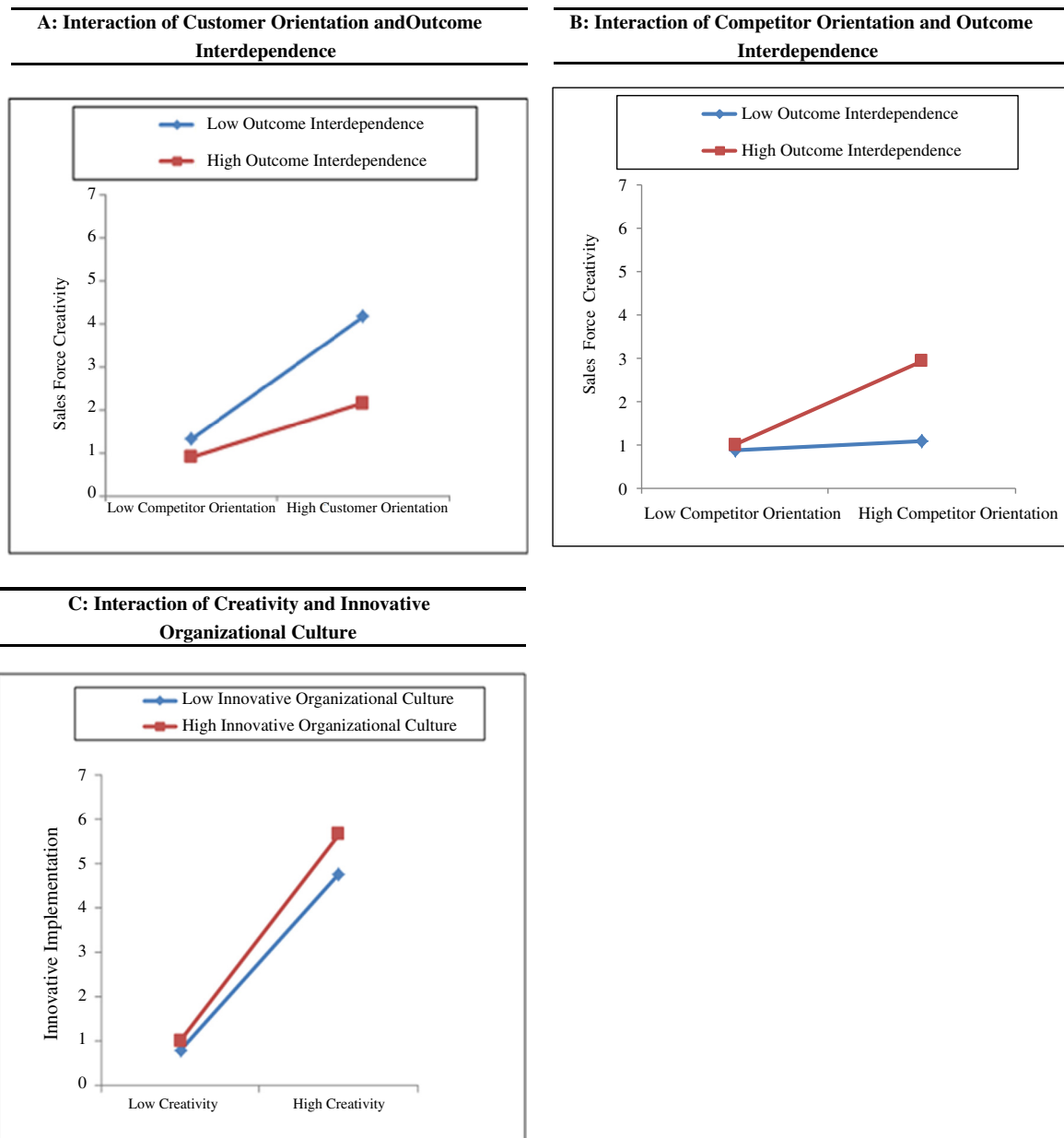


Fig. 2. Interaction Effects.

and innovation, and salespeople usually do not have a formal responsibility for innovation (Judson et al., 2006), yet in reality sales managers and salespeople alike must frequently demonstrate creativity and implement innovative processes in order to be more effective in creating and capturing value in the hyper competitive environment. Joshi (2010) argues that due to their proximity to customers and the marketplace, salespeople play a preeminent role in driving product modifications and that it pays to listen to salespeople for their innovative ideas. Our study adds to this stream of research by identifying the differential roles of three MO dimensions in the process of sales force creativity and implementation, which is also a response to recent calls for more research on innovation in sales and areas other than R&D (Evans et al., 2012; Wiersema, 2012).

In summary, this study makes three contributions to the marketing, sales, and innovation literature. First, it identified one important boundary condition, namely outcome interdependence, that has differential moderating effects on two of the three MO dimensions in the sales force innovation process. Such differential effects would be masked if

an aggregate construct of MO was used, which attests to the merit of investigating MO at its dimensional level. Second, results of this study reveal that in an innovative organizational culture creative ideas will be more likely implemented, which has a significant positive impact on sales performance. Third, our study attests to the critical role of sales force innovation in building competitive advantage and achieving superior performance.

6.2. Limitations and future research

Despite its contributions, the study has some limitations due to the data characteristics and research context. Our data is cross-sectional and from a single source. Although the findings of significant positive and negative interactions have alleviated the common method bias concern, future studies may wish to use data from multiple sources and/or longitudinal data for more robust causal inferences. Our research setting is the US manufacturing sector and the findings should be applicable to the industrial and manufacturing firms in the US. The extent to which

Table 4
Moderation effects of innovative culture and behavior-based supervision on innovation implementation.

	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 3 (β)
<i>Control variables</i>			
Market dynamism	.20**	.12*	.11*
Technological turbulence	.01	-.05	-.05
Competitive intensity	-.06	-.06	-.09
<i>Direct effects</i>			
Creativity (CREAT)		.69**	.69**
Innovative organizational culture (INNOCUL)		.06	.06
Behavior-based supervision (BEHSUP)		.13*	.13*
<i>Interactions</i>			
CREAT × INNOCUL			.08†
CREAT × BEHSUP			-.07
R2	.04	.62	.63
ΔR2	-	.58**	.01
F-statistic	2.03	39.71**	30.13**
d.f.	3	6	8

† $p < .10$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

results are generalizable to the service sector or to a different culture remains to be seen.

Limitations aside, this research also points to potentially fruitful areas for future research. First, despite the significance of MO, innovation, and creativity to marketing and sales management, there is a scarcity of integrative research linking those topics in the sales setting (Evans et al., 2012). Future research could also identify additional boundary conditions such as informal control in managing sales force creativity. Second, as creativity and innovation could be related to products, services, business processes, administrative processes, and could be incremental or disruptive in nature, future research may examine the possibly different antecedents, moderators, and outcomes of different types of innovation in the sales context. Finally, we found that customer orientation has a weaker effect on creativity when there is a higher level of outcome interdependence. Future research could explore the underlying mechanism and strategies to better utilize customer-based intelligence in environments characterized by high levels of outcome interdependence.

Appendix A. Multi-item scales

Customer orientation ($\alpha = .91$; AVE = .69; 1 = not accurate at all, 7 = very accurate)
1. Being committed to customers
2. Creating customer value
3. Understanding customer needs
4. Meeting customer satisfaction objectives
5. Conducting superior customer service
Competitor orientation ($\alpha = .88$; AVE = .65; 1 = not accurate at all, 7 = very accurate)
1. Sharing competitor information within the sales department
2. Responding rapidly to competitors' action
3. Discussing competitors' strategies
4. Targeting opportunities for competitive advantage.
Interfunctional coordination ($\alpha = .89$; AVE = .67; 1 = not at all, 7 = to a significant degree)
1. Information shared among different functions
2. Functional integration in business strategy
3. All functions contribute to customer value
4. Share resources with other business units
Creativity ($\alpha = .91$; AVE = .68; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
1. Our salespeople are a great source of useful ideas for market and product innovation
2. Our salespeople frequently come up with new ideas for satisfying customer needs
3. Our salespeople routinely generate and evaluate multiple alternatives for novel customer problem

Appendix A (continued).

Creativity ($\alpha = .91$; AVE = .68; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
4. Our sales force has fresh perspectives on old problems
5. Our salespeople often improvise methods for solving customer problems when an answer is not apparent
Innovation implementation ($\alpha = .95$; AVE = .67; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
1. Many innovative ideas from our salespeople are adopted in our organization
2. Innovative ideas from our salespeople have been implemented to improve customer service
3. Our salespeople are willing to invest time and effort to ensure that their ideas are successfully implemented in the company
4. Our salespeople actively work with other functional departments to ensure their ideas are implemented
5. Our salespeople are willing to take risk in implementing their ideas for the good of the company
6. The new ideas from our salespeople have resulted in greater customer service quality
7. Our customer service has improved as a result of adopting our salespeople's ideas
8. Many of our new products in the past few years have resulted from our salespeople's input
9. Our performance in customer satisfaction and loyalty can be attributed to the implementation of many of the ideas from our salespeople
Task interdependence ($\alpha = .81$; AVE = .60; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
1. Our salespeople are dependent on the cooperation of their colleagues to successfully do their job
2. Our salespeople's performance depends on the tasks performed by other people in our department
3. Our salespeople have to work in formal or informal teams to get their job done
Outcome interdependence ($\alpha = .82$; AVE = .64; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
1. Each salesperson's performance evaluation depends on how well the whole sales department performs
2. Individual salespeople's rewards and gains are determined largely by the performance of the whole sales department
3. Salespeople are held accountable for the overall performance of the sales department
Innovative organizational culture ($\alpha = .81$; AVE = .57; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
1. Technical innovation, based on research results, is readily accepted in our company
2. Innovation is readily accepted in program/project management
3. Our company welcomes all sorts of innovative ideas
Behavior-based supervision ($\alpha = .62$; AVE = .43; 1 = not accurate at all, 7 = very accurate)
1. I make sure that every salesperson knows what to do and how to do it
2. I stay in close contact with every salesperson
3. Our salespeople have much day-to-day interaction with me
Market dynamism ($\alpha = .76$; AVE = .68; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
1. In our kind of business, customers' product preferences change quite a bit over time
2. Our customers tend to look for new product all the time
Technological turbulence ($\alpha = .89$; AVE = .68; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
1. The technology in our industry is changing rapidly
2. Technological changes provided big opportunities in our industry
3. A large number of new product ideas have been made possible through technological breakthroughs in our industry
4. Technological developments in our industry are rather significant
Competitive intensity ($\alpha = .80$; AVE = .51; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
1. Competition in our industry is cutthroat
2. Price competition is a hallmark of our industry
3. One hears of a new competitive move almost every day
4. There are many competitors in our target market
Sales performance ($\alpha = .82$; AVE = .63; 1 = very poor, 7 = excellent)
1. Sales volume compared to your own objectives/targets
2. Market share compared to your own objectives/targets
3. Profitability compared to your own objectives/targets

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