

**SALESPERSON PERSONALITY AND SPHERE OF INFLUENCE AS
DETERMINANTS OF SALES PERFORMANCE**

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2017

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To my wife Barbara for cheerfully creating the space in our lives to allow me to do this,
my daughter Katie for “running things” during my frequent absences, and
Jackie, Stephanie, Dad, Mom, Ron, Ingrid, Jimi, Alex, Nina and Dave for their
encouragement. I seriously could not have done this without you.
Love you all so much.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the guidance and mentoring of my Dissertation Committee Chair, Dr. Philip Podsakoff. At times he led me, and other times he pushed me. There were times he encouraged me and other times he provided “learning opportunities”. At all times, he patiently taught me and held me accountable to high standards. Further, I would like to acknowledge my Dissertation Committee Member, Dr. Joyce Bono who first taught me to be curious during the process of research and not let my personal beliefs about the outcome prematurely prejudice my thinking.

I would also like to acknowledge Katherine Stewart for her assistance on the administration of the survey and proofreading. She allowed me to remain detached from the survey process providing anonymity in data collection and accuracy in data formatting. She directed the management teams in the local offices in order to distribute the survey according to the IRB approved process and then she tabulated the results into a usable format. She was assisted by Keller Williams Realty Administrators Nancy Freeman, Christi League, Kelli Patton and others as well as Operating Partners Stacie Velliquette, Kevin Chadwick and Paul Cornuke.

Because this was my first study, I sought tutoring in the area of statistical analysis. Yuxi Qiu, a UF College of Education PhD student studying under the supervision of Dr. Walter Leite, provided timely and relevant tutoring in the area of confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. His assistance allowed me to complete the statistical analysis with fewer mistakes and within the time allotted.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my DBA study group partners Tom Arnold and Brent Berthy. Although they were not actively involved in this dissertation, their accountability, collaboration and encouragement during the past few years helped make this all possible. I am grateful for their counsel and their friendship.

ABSTRACT

Much has been written on the determinants of the performance of salespeople. The clear majority of this literature can be divided into roughly three categories – (a) the individual characteristics and intrinsic motivation of the salespeople, (b) the impact of extrinsic motivators such as compensation and rewards on the sales force, and (c) the type of sales force management systems that are utilized. The focus of this research falls into the first category. More specifically, salespeople’s conscientiousness, extraversion and core self-evaluations are examined as they relate to their ability to build a sphere of influence from which they can generate sales. As a first step in the study, a new construct named *sphere of influence* is introduced that describes the characteristics of the accumulated group of individuals over which the salesperson exerts influence and receives sales leads. Following this, a model is tested that identifies three personality variables (conscientiousness, extraversion and core self-evaluations) that should be positively related to a salesperson’s sphere of influence. Social capital theory and social influence theory is used to link a salesperson’s sphere of influence to their sales performance.

The results indicate that the personality variables tested have little direct impact on sales performance. Using survey data from real estate salespeople in Florida (N = 267), the results show that the relationships between conscientiousness and core self-evaluations and sales performance is fully mediated by the sphere of influence construct. However, somewhat surprisingly, conscientiousness was negatively related to the sales peoples’ sphere of influence, whereas core self-evaluations were positively related to it. Extraversion was not found to be related to either salespersons’ sphere of influence or their sales performance. Implications of these findings for researchers and practitioners are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The determinants of salespeople's performance have been of interest to practitioners and academics alike for the past several decades (Bagozzi, 1978, Churchill, Ford & Walker, 1979; Churchill, Ford, Hartley & Walker, 1985; Barrick, Mount & Strauss, 1993; Vinchur, Schippmann, Switzer & Roth, 1998; Erez & Judge, 2001; MacKenzie, Podsakoff & Ahearne, 1998). The clear majority of studies reported in this literature can be divided into roughly three categories. The first of these categories focuses on the effects that individual difference variables and intrinsic motivation have on salesperson success (Churchill et al., 1979; Churchill et al., 1985). Examples of this type of research include the study by Szymanski (1988), who found that declarative knowledge, defined as a person's ability to blend product needs and selling process needs, was positively associated with the amount of sales success. Another example is a study by Sujian, Sujian, and Bettman (1988) who reported that a salesperson's knowledge structure, defined as the ability to recognize customer types and adapt accordingly, increased sales effectiveness.

The second category emphasizes the effects that extrinsic motivators such as compensation and rewards have on sales success. For example, Zoltners, Singh, and Lorimer (2008) proposed a comprehensive research framework for studying salesperson extrinsic motivators that included compensation, training, and management systems, among others. Churchill et al. (1979) evaluated seven different types of rewards across various characteristics of salespeople and found that more tenured salespeople were more motivated by financial rewards whereas less tenured salespeople were more interested in growth and promotional opportunities. Stewart (1996) studied reward structure as a moderator of the relationship between

extraversion and sales performance and found that extraverted people were more successful when motivated by new business rewards rather than customer retention.

Finally, the third category focuses attention on the impact that various types of sales force management systems have on salesperson effectiveness (Zoltners et al, 2008). One example of this type of research is the study reported by Grant and Cravens (1996), who evaluated behavior-based sales management control systems. Behavior-based sales management systems, being oriented toward managing and monitoring salesperson behaviors such as performing sales activities and tasks, were compared with outcome-based sales management systems, which are more oriented toward managing sales results. Grant and Cravens found that behavior-based sales management systems were positively correlated to outcome-based sales management systems and to sales performance, indicating that sales managers could improve sales performance by managing salesperson activities and tasks as well as outcomes. Ahearne, Mathieu and Rapp (2005), who studied leadership empowerment and its effect on salespeople, present another example. They found that less-experienced salespeople who felt empowered by their leaders exhibited higher degrees of self-efficacy and increases in performance. Cravens, Lask, Low, Marshall and Moncrief (2004), who reported that salespeople perform better and experience less stress when they are in an environment where the organization exerts a high level of management control over the salesforce, provide a final example in their study.

Although much has been learned from these previous studies on the determinants of salesperson effectiveness, notably missing from this research is the role that a salesperson's sphere of influence has on his/her sales success. Generally speaking, a salesperson's sphere of influence represents the group of people who are known by the salesperson from which sales can be generated (Evans, 2002). Because one's sphere of influence is expected to represent the group

of potential contacts that the salesperson can rely upon for the identification of sales opportunities, there are several major reasons why I expect salespeople who possess larger spheres of influence to enjoy more sales success than salespeople who possess smaller spheres of influence. Thus, the major purpose of this study is to build and test a theoretical model that examines some potential antecedents and consequences of a salesperson's sphere of influence. More specifically, I develop a conceptual model that draws on the personality literature to argue that three personality variables (conscientiousness, extraversion and core self-evaluations) are likely to increase a salesperson's sphere of influence. In addition, I will draw on the social capital and social influence literatures to link a salesperson's sphere of influence to their subsequent sales performance.

THE NATURE AND MEANING OF THE SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Before presenting the conceptual model, it is important to describe what one's sphere of influence means. The term *sphere of influence (SOI)* is used frequently by sales practitioners to identify the group of people that are known by the salesperson from which future business can be generated (Evans, 2002). For the purposes of this study, the term *SOI* will be more precisely defined as *the quantity and quality of the group of people known by a salesperson, with which the salesperson has regular contact, and that creates an opportunity to produce positive influence from which the salesperson can generate business*. Conceptually, the definition of *SOI* is composed of three parts: (a) the *number* of people that interact with the salesperson directly, defined as first-level contacts, (b) the *strength of the relationship (influence)* between the people in first-level contact with the salesperson, and (c) the level of potential *influence* the people in these first-level contact relationships have on others, referred to in the study as second-level contacts.

Figure 1 provides a simplified pictorial example of a SOI. The first component of the definition is represented by the quantity of people with whom the salesperson has first-level contact relationships. This number is relevant in that it illustrates the number of people that the salesperson could potentially influence directly through regular interactions. It should follow that a salesperson interacting with a larger number of people over whom they can utilize their influence will generate more opportunities for sales than a salesperson with a smaller number of contacts.

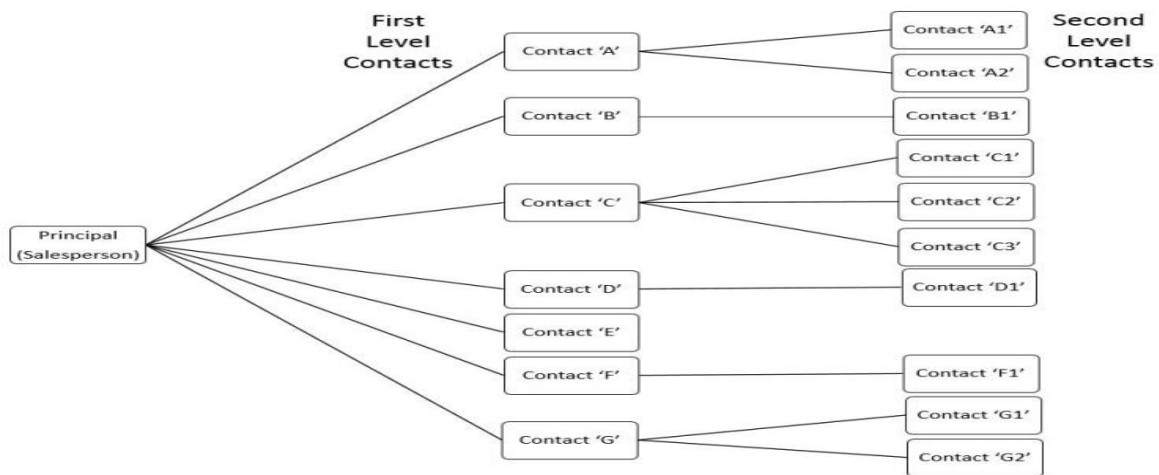


Figure 1: A Simplified Illustration of a SOI

The second component of the definition is represented by the frequency of interactions between the salesperson and the first-level contacts. Like product brand awareness that is developed through traditional advertising and promotional activities, a salesperson seeking sales leads from others needs to develop personal brand awareness with the people they are in contact with. In product marketing, brand awareness creates a familiarity with products leading to increased sales over time. Also in product marketing, a brand awareness creates an association between a product category and the most well-known product in that category, thus creating increased sales over time. Keller (1993) has argued that consumers will include familiar brands

in their decision set and may be more likely to choose a familiar brand over the other brands in the decision set. Consistent with this, Hoyer and Brown (1990) found that consumers in an initial choice situation were overwhelmingly more likely to choose the product with which they had brand awareness over an unknown brand. An example of this is the brand awareness position that McDonald's restaurants holds within the fast-food restaurant category. Similarly, a salesperson with strong brand awareness should be familiar to a larger number of people. A strong top-of-mind position with these people should create a situation where the salesperson becomes the first to come to mind when their sales category is mentioned. Over time, this should result in the salesperson receiving more sales leads resulting in improved sales performance. The frequency of the interactions between the salesperson and his/her first-level contacts should be an indicator of the strength of the relationship and should positively influence the salesperson's top-of-mind position. A casual relationship or infrequent interactions might be less likely to produce this top-of-mind position than a longer relationship with multiple relevant transactions. For example, two neighbors who have attended a few of the same social events will have a weaker relationship than two people that who have been associates for many years, have had numerous conversations with each other, and have conducted business together on multiple occasions. Therefore, the frequency of interactions should increase the top-of-mind position of the salesperson, thereby increasing the number of leads for potential sales.

The third component of the definition is related to the amount of influence the first-level contacts have on others, represented in Figure 1 by the second-level contacts. Cialdini (1984) lists social proof, authority, and liking as three different types of influence. Social proof means that people will do what they see others doing. In a product-marketing context, sharing testimonials from satisfied customers is a common tactic utilized by advertisers and marketers to

create social proof. People also tend to follow those in positions of authority and are influenced by people they like. For example, a company President might have access to a large population of employees over which there is a high degree of direct influence. Employees in the President's company might be more inclined to listen and respond to his advice on a wide range of issues, including when he refers the employee to a salesperson. Similarly, a popular Pastor might have a large congregation over which there is a high degree of influence. Members of the Pastor's congregation, having a sense of affection toward the Pastor, might respond favorably when the Pastor recommends a salesperson. Conversely, two members of a social club may not have the same level of direct influence on each other as a President or a Pastor might have over their constituents. Thus, a SOI that contains multiple company presidents, pastors and other individuals with similar ability to influence a large number of people should prove to be more fruitful than a SOI filled with people in less impactful positions.

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

The proposed model that guides this study is depicted in Figure 2. As indicated in this figure, I expect that salespeople's conscientiousness, extraversion and core self-evaluations will influence sales performance both directly, as well as indirectly through the mediating effects of the salespersons' sphere of influence. The proposal is that a salesperson who is organized, diligent, and achievement-oriented (i.e. high conscientiousness), outgoing and social (i.e. high extraversion) and displaying an optimistic and positive attitude (i.e. high CSE), should be able to develop a productive *SOI* that will generate a higher number of sales opportunities and subsequent sales. Alternatively, a person with lower levels of conscientiousness, extraversion and CSE will likely create a correspondingly less productive *SOI*, resulting in lower sales.

Each of the linkages illustrated in the model will be discussed below. First, previous personality research will be discussed to provide a theoretical rationale for the relationships between a salesperson’s level of conscientiousness, extraversion and core self-evaluations and his/her sales performance. Next, a discussion of these personality variables as they are expected to relate to the salesperson’s sphere of influence will be presented. Although the SOI construct has not been discussed previously in the literature, there are several reasons why these linkages might exist. Following this, social capital theory (Coleman, 1988) and social influence theory (Cialdini, 1984; Cialdini, 2013) will be used to explain the expected linkage between a salesperson’s sphere of influence and their sales performance. Finally, I will explain why a salesperson’s sphere of influence should mediate the relationships between a salesperson’s personality variables and his/her sales performance.

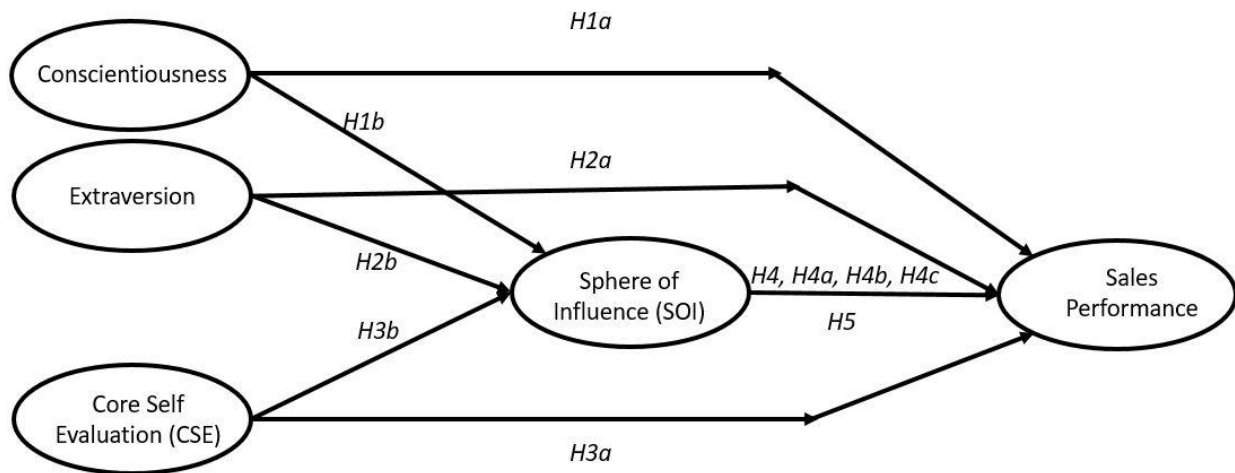


Figure 2-Hypothesized Model of the Antecedents, Consequences and Mediation of a Salesperson’s Sphere of Influence

Conscientiousness and the sphere of influence and sales performance

According to Judge, Higgins, Thoresen and Barrick (1999), conscientious people are described as achievement-oriented, dependable, hardworking, persistent, responsible, careful,

planful and organized. In a sales role, there are several reasons why these personality characteristics would be expected to lead to increased sales. First, being achievement oriented should provide the internal drive for the salesperson to want to perform at a higher level and increase sales. Second, a strong work ethic and positive work habits including planfulness and organizational skills should allow the salesperson to handle a larger client base and a larger number of transactions, thereby producing higher levels of sales performance. Finally, a salesperson with this combination of drive, work ethic and good work habits should eventually draw and maintain the favorable attention of people with whom they come in contact. This should create an increased level of brand awareness that should result in improved sales performance over time.

Consistent with these expectations, Barrick & Mount (1991) performed a meta-analysis across five occupational groups that illustrated a significant positive correlation between conscientiousness and job performance for salespeople. In addition, Vinchur, Schippmann, Switzer and Roth's (1998) meta-analytic study reported a corrected correlation of 0.23 between the achievement-orientation component of conscientiousness and objective sales performance. Thus, one would expect that salespeople who express high levels of conscientiousness should exhibit higher levels of sales performance than salespeople who express lower levels of this trait. Thus, I hypothesize that:

H1a: There is a positive relationship between salespeople's conscientiousness and sales performance.

I also expect that salespeople that are more conscientious will generate a larger sphere of influence than less conscientious salespeople will. This expectation is based on the notion that their work ethic, dependability, responsiveness and organizational skills will draw the favorable

attention of the people surrounding them and differentiate them from less conscientious salespeople, resulting in a larger sphere of influence. Barrick, Mount and Strauss (1993) reported that conscientiousness had a positive effect on both sales performance and supervisor rankings. If a supervisor views a more conscientious person more favorably than a supervisor views a less conscientious person, then one might expect that other people would also view a more conscientious person favorably relative to a less conscientious person. Therefore, a salesperson with higher levels of conscientiousness should create a positive perception that attracts more people to the salesperson's SOI. O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, and Story (2011) have provided additional indirect evidence in support of this idea in their study of the relationship between personality, emotional intelligence, and job performance. In their study, emotional intelligence is defined as the ability for an individual to recognize, understand and evaluate the connection of their own emotions to the emotions of the people they are interacting with. Capitalizing on this connection, people with higher levels of emotional intelligence should be able to alter their behavior to adapt to the current situation and thereby achieve an emotional connection and outcomes that are more favorable. They found positive correlations between conscientiousness, emotional intelligence, and job performance. These findings indirectly relate to the ideas about SOI, in that a salesperson's ability to connect with people in an emotionally favorable way should increase the number of people in the salesperson's SOI. Finally, Chen, Huang, Huang and Liu (2011) who studied interview preparation and impression management tactics provide additional indirect evidence. They found that conscientiousness was correlated to interview preparation and that preparation was correlated to liking. It is understandable that an interviewer would respond favorably to a more conscientious interview candidate who is well prepared and therefore presents a favorable image. Similarly, a salesperson who is higher in

conscientiousness might project the image of being more prepared thereby creating a favorable and likeable impression, eventually resulting in a larger SOI. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

H1b: There is a positive relationship between salespeople's conscientiousness and the number of people included in their sphere of influence.

Extraversion and the sphere of influence and sales performance

According to Judge, Higgins, Thoresen and Barrick (1999), extraverted people are described as sociable, outgoing, gregarious, dominant, ambitious, adventuresome and assertive. In a sales role, there are several reasons why these personality characteristics would be expected to lead to increased sales. First, people that are more sociable and outgoing should be more at ease in interpersonal interactions thereby establishing rapport with potential customers more quickly. Building rapport should lead to a situation where the customer becomes more willing to share information that could lead to higher sales. Second, higher levels of dominance, ambition and assertiveness should provide the salesperson with the tendency to push harder to identify customer needs. Once customer needs are identified, these same characteristics should provide the salesperson with an increased ability to find solutions and close the sale, thereby increasing sales performance. Third, a salesperson that is more adventuresome might be willing to try more innovative sales techniques or look for creative solutions to problems. Eventually this should favorably impress customers and increase sales. Finally, the sum of these extraversion personality characteristics will eventually lead to an overall favorable personal impression of the salesperson that will increase personal brand awareness and increase sales.

Consistent with these expectations, Barrick & Mount's (1991) meta-analysis of five occupational groups illustrated that extraversion was a valid predictor of job performance for managers and salespeople. In addition, Vinchur, Schippmann, Switzer and Roth's (1998) meta-

analytic study indicated that the extraversion personality dimension predicted sales measures with a validity coefficient of 0.22. The subcomponent of potency, identified as an extraversion trait similar to assertiveness, was particularly useful for predicting sales measures with a validity coefficient of 0.26. Lastly, Conte and Gintoft (2005), in their study of polychronicity, personality and sales performance, reported that extraversion was significantly related to sales performance with a correlation coefficient of 0.20. Thus, I hypothesize that:

H2a: There is a positive relationship between salespeople's extraversion and sales performance.

I also expect that more extraverted salespeople will generate a larger sphere of influence than less extraverted salespeople. This expectation is based on the notion that their sociability, gregariousness, dominance, ambition, adventurousness and assertiveness will draw the favorable attention of the people surrounding them and differentiate them from less extraverted salespeople, thus resulting in a larger sphere of influence. Costa and McCrae (1980) investigated the influence of extraversion on well-being and happiness. Across three studies, they found that extraverted people, most notably driven by the sociability component of their personality, displayed consistently higher happiness ratings. Judge, Bono, Illies and Gerhardt (2002) performed a meta-analysis of the relationship between personality characteristics and leadership. Extraversion was found to exhibit the most consistent correlation with leadership in general, with an estimated corrected correlation coefficient of 0.31. Two sub-categories of leadership were also evaluated. Leadership emergence refers to the degree that others view someone as a leader. Leadership effectiveness refers to the leader's ability to influence a group toward attainment of the group's goals. These two criteria of leadership emergence and leadership effectiveness when evaluated in relation to extraversion produced corrected correlation coefficients of 0.33 and 0.24

respectively. Tett, Steele and Beauregard (2003), in their study of both broad and narrow measures of personality and job performance, reported that sociability and likeability were correlated to interpersonal influence with coefficients of 0.17 and 0.27 respectively. From these studies, it is easy to conclude that extraverted people tend to be happier, more likely to be viewed as a leader and more interpersonally influential. These characteristics should provide an attraction factor that should increase the number of people with a salesperson's sphere of influence. Thus, I hypothesize:

H2b: There is a positive relationship between salespeople's extraversion and the number of people included in their sphere of influence.

Core self-evaluations and the sphere of influence and sales performance

In addition to conscientiousness and extraversion, I also expect a salesperson's core self-evaluations (CSE) to influence their performance and their sphere of influence. Per Judge, Locke and Durham (1997), CSE is a combination of four extensively studied traits. The first of these traits is self-esteem, which is a belief in one's own value. The second is self-efficacy, described as a person's belief in their ability to perform. Next is neuroticism, which is the tendency of an individual to focus on the negative aspects of themselves. Some definitions replace neuroticism with the opposite trait of emotional stability. Emotional stability is the inverse tendency of an individual to focus on positive aspects of themselves. Finally, locus of control is the ability for an individual to see events as the outcomes of their own behavior (Judge, Erez & Bono, 1998). Combined, these four traits create a sense of positivity and a favorable view of a person's own worth, value and capability (Judge, Erez & Bono, 1998).

There are several reasons why CSE would be expected to be related to sales performance. First, Judge, Erez and Bono (1998) argue that high-CSE people are more motivated and therefore

perform at a higher level. A person that is more motivated should be more inclined to work harder in general. A salesperson who possesses higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, believing in their own value and their ability to perform, should also possess the confidence required to pursue leads and improve sales. Additionally, a salesperson with an internal locus of control, believing that their actions and behavior will eventually lead to results, should be more inclined to develop the habits that will lead to positive sales performance. In their comprehensive review of CSE research, Bono and Judge (2003) suggest that high-CSE people might also overcome obstacles by using more effective problem solving strategies. The ability to overcome obstacles and solve problems is a key skill in the selling process. A salesperson who persists in the face of obstacles and problems is more likely to perform at a higher level. Bono and Judge (2003) propose that high-CSE people might perform better in environments where positive interpersonal relations and stress tolerance are required. It follows that a salesperson who is skillful in developing positive interpersonal relationships and who can function effectively under stress should be able to perform at a higher level. Finally, Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge and Scott (2009) found that high-CSE people were associated with higher levels of coping, specifically lower levels of avoidance coping and higher levels of problem solving coping. In a sales role, a lower level of avoidance coping and a higher level of problem solving coping should assist the salesperson in overcoming rejection as well as facing and resolving customer issues. The ability to overcome rejection and solve customer problems should result in the salesperson achieving higher levels of sales performance.

Consistent with the above arguments, Judge and Bono (2001) examined the relationship between the four CSE traits and job performance in a meta-analysis, and reported an average correlation of 0.23. Perhaps more importantly, Erez and Judge (2001) examined the relationship

between CSE and sales performance in three samples of insurance sales agents, and reported that the intercorrelation between overall CSE and actual sales volume was 0.35. Further, these authors also found that CSE accounted for incremental variance in the sales performance of the agents in their sample, even after controlling for conscientiousness. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

H3a: There is a positive relationship between salespeople's core self-evaluations and their sales performance.

For a variety of reasons, I also expect core self-evaluations to be positively related to a salesperson's sphere of influence. As mentioned earlier, a person that possesses higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, believing their own value and ability to perform, should possess the confidence required to initiate contacts not only within their existing SOI but also with unfamiliar people that represent potential additions to their SOI. Heller, Judge and Watson (2002) evaluated the relationship between CSE, job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Their results indicated that CSE was positively correlated with both job satisfaction and life satisfaction. People who are satisfied in both their job and their life in general should exude a positive demeanor, thereby attracting others to them. Bono and Judge (2003) also propose that a person with high CSE might be more likeable, and therefore might receive higher performance rankings. As discussed earlier, a person who exhibits behavior and attitudes that cause them to be more liked by their manager or by an interviewer is likely exhibiting behavior that will create favor with anyone they interact with. The general public would be expected to have a similar favorable reaction to this positive attitude and behavior. This favorable reaction should eventually attract more people to high-CSE salespeople resulting in an expanding SOI over time. Second, a higher level of emotional stability should result in a sense of positivity. It is easy to

imagine that a high sense of positivity will also provide an attraction that should result in a larger number of individuals in the SOI. Finally, a salesperson with an internal locus of control, believing that their actions will eventually lead to results, should develop the habit of confidently approaching people, establishing a relationship and subsequently including them as a part of the SOI. Thus, I hypothesize that:

H3b: There is a positive relationship between salespeople's core self-evaluations and the number of people included in their sphere of influence.

The link between the sphere of influence and sales performance

Two behavioral concepts are proposed as drivers of the interchange between the salesperson and their SOI. This interchange is believed to be essential in creating sales opportunities. The two behavioral concepts are prosocial behavior and the theory of reciprocity. There is not a consensus among scholars regarding the precise definition of prosocial behavior. However, it has generally been described as the tendency for people to take action intended to help the person to whom it is directed (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). In some definitions, there is the additional condition that nothing is required in return. Reciprocity has been defined as the desire to want to respond in kind when receiving an item of value. Reciprocity has been identified as one of the key components of social influence (Cialdini, 1984; Cialdini, 2013). In the context of a salesperson's SOI, the tendency to want to act in a way that will help others (prosocial behavior) and the desire to respond in kind (reciprocity) should work both ways. The salesperson should be inclined to want to help people in their SOI. Conversely, the individuals in the SOI should be naturally inclined to want to help the salesperson, especially when a reciprocating situation is created by the salesperson. George and Bettenhausen (1990) studied prosocial behavior and sales performance in the context of customer service. They proposed the

idea that customer service, being the process of identifying customer needs and responding with information and knowledgeable advice, is a form of prosocial behavior. This process of needs identification and solution-oriented responses creates both a favorable impression with customers and an associated obligation of sorts, resulting in a reciprocal increase in sales. Their study identified a positive correlation between prosocial behavior and sales performance.

As hypothesized earlier, a salesperson that is high in conscientiousness, extraversion and CSE is more likely to demonstrate the behaviors and attitudes that will draw favorable attention from the existing people in their SOI, as well as potential new additions to their SOI. The concepts of prosocial behavior and reciprocity create the situation where this favorable attention and the emerging relationship may result in the exchange of value between the salesperson and people in their SOI. Tangible value can be exchanged in forms such as gifts, meals and coupons, among others. Intangible value may be shared in the form of information, communication and introductions. This value exchange could potentially create a subtle obligation (Coleman, 1988) wherein the individuals within the SOI might be inclined to reciprocate in some way. The frequency of these interactions, particularly when value is exchanged, accomplishes two objectives. First, it increases brand awareness and top-of-mind positioning as discussed earlier. Second, it creates a potential reciprocity situation that should result in the SOI feeling obligated to assist the salesperson by sharing information about sales opportunities and recommending the salesperson to others. Boles, Brashear, Bellenger and Barksdale (2000) provided tangential evidence in support of this expectation in their research on relationship selling wherein they found that interaction intensity had a significant impact on salesperson performance. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

H4: Salespeople's SOI will be positively related to sales performance.

The mediating effects of SOI on the relationship between personality variables and sales performance

Until now, the focus has been on the relationships between the three personality variables of conscientiousness, extraversion and CSE and the two outcomes of SOI and sales performance, as well as the relationship between SOI and sales performance. I have hypothesized that SOI will be positively influenced by conscientiousness, extraversion and CSE, and that SOI will positively influence sales performance. This raises the possibility that SOI could mediate the relationship between the personality variables and sales performance. Barrick, Mount and Strauss (1993) tested the mediating effect of goal setting on the relationship between conscientiousness and salesperson performance. They found that goal setting, used as a surrogate measure of salesperson motivation, positively mediated the relationship between conscientiousness and sales performance.

Similarly, I propose that SOI, used as a surrogate measure of market potential or market size, should positively mediate the relationship between personality and sales performance. In fact, this is the expected outcome in this study for the following reason. I have described conscientious people as dependable, reliable and diligent. I have also described high-CSE people as optimistic, positive and likeable. I have hypothesized that conscientious, extraverted, high-CSE salespeople should have more people in their SOI, better relationships with the people in their SOI and have more influence over the people in their SOI than salespeople with lower levels of conscientiousness, extraversion and CSE. This effectively increases the size of the available market for the salesperson. Salespeople with this combination of quantity, relationship quality and amount of influence would be expected to receive more leads from their SOI (i.e. an increased market size) and therefore, they should be able to sell more products. For this reason, I

expect SOI to partially mediate the relationship between the two personality variables and sales performance.

H5: A salesperson's sphere of influence will partially mediate the relationship between their conscientiousness, extraversion and CSE and sales performance.

METHODS

Research Setting and Participants

The sample for this study was comprised of real estate agents in Florida. The real estate industry has experienced both positive and negative market cycles over the past 15 years. Between 2000 and 2012, real estate salespeople experienced rapid growth and high earnings followed by an equally abnormal period of declining sales and depressed earnings. The market began to stabilize in 2012, and a noticeably different market emerged. Because of the financial devastation in the housing and mortgage markets during this period, the regulatory environment changed significantly. Not only was housing supply and demand unstable, but also financing availability was extremely unpredictable. This period of instability and unpredictability amplified the failure rate of real estate salespeople.

Real estate salespeople typically operate in a highly independent manner, licensed under a local real estate broker as independent contractors. Compensation is essentially all commission-based. It is an individualized, pay-for-performance career where the various types of external motivators and sales management systems that exist in formal sales organizations are less relevant. Because of the unique characteristics of real estate sales jobs, real estate sales agents provide an excellent population for research regarding the effects that individual difference variables have on individual salesperson performance.

This study utilized real estate salespeople that have attained their license and are currently active in real estate sales. This group has demonstrated sufficient cognitive ability to

complete the licensing classes and pass the required state exams. This study focuses on the relationship between salesperson's conscientiousness, extraversion and CSE, the quality of their SOI and their subsequent sales performance.

This population provides an interesting sample in that they are all independent contractors of a major national real estate brokerage. The brokerage has been recognized for its high-quality training and coaching systems providing virtually all salespeople with an equal opportunity for success. Because the brokerage follows a "salesperson-centric" model, the salespeople are well trained but they are not a part of a formalized employer-employee form of sales management system. Therefore, their sales volume is largely dependent upon their own ability to generate business. They are compensated wholly through commissions on their closed sales volume.

Procedure

The company operates approximately 60 offices in Florida and over 750 offices internationally. The company believes that it takes about 6 months for a newly hired salesperson to "settle in" and begin to demonstrate their competence and work habits and receive compensation from their efforts. For this reason, I targeted a sample size of at least 300 real estate salespeople, with a minimum experience level of 12 months.

The owners and sales managers were screened to insure their commitment to the precise process approved by the UF Institutional Review Board. To determine if an office could be included in the study, the office's consistency in the criteria for hiring and training salespeople was confirmed. After determining each office's suitability for inclusion and willingness to participate, a key person was identified in each office to assist with the administration of the survey and the collection of sales performance data. Because the author is involved in the

management of several of the real estate company's offices, anonymity was necessary to insure the validity of the survey responses. Participation in the study was voluntary and no incentive for participation was offered. Anonymity is assured through the utilization of independent data collectors that furnished a data set without any individual identifying information.

The survey was prepared and administered using Qualtrics. It included 61 multiple-choice questions on demographics, previous experience, business practices and personality, and one quantitative question on the occupational status composition of the salesperson's marketing database. The survey was distributed to the real estate salespeople via email with a link to the Qualtrics website. The survey was sent to approximately 2200 real estate salespeople in 12 different offices. A total of 359 surveys were returned for a 16% response rate. Of the survey responses, 51 surveys were incomplete or missing multiple pieces of required data, 22 salespeople did not have sufficient time in the role, 14 were in offices that did not reply to the request for sales data and another 5 were eliminated because of duplication (husband and wife teams) or other miscellaneous reasons. This left us with a usable sample of 267 surveys, for an effective response rate of about 12%. The sample was 63% female, with an average age of 50. Participants had an average of 7.2 years of real estate sales experience and an average of 12.6 years of full-time work experience prior to entering real estate sales. Approximately 6% of the group had a high school degree only, 39% had attended college courses but had no college degree, 43% had received a college degree, and 12% had graduate degrees.

Measures

Personality variables. Conscientiousness and extraversion were measured with a version of the Mini-IPIP personality assessment inventory that has been shown to possess good validity and reliability in previous studies (Donnellan, Oswald, Baird & Lucas, 2006). The Mini-IPIP

consists of 20 items with four items for each of the factors in the Five Factor Model. In our survey, we only used the four items for the conscientiousness and extraversion factors. The Mini-IPIP scale uses a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from (5) “very accurate” to (1) “very inaccurate”.

Core self-evaluations (CSE) were measured using the 12-item scale developed by Judge, Erez, Bono and Thoresen (2003). This direct measurement scale has demonstrated good validity and reliability when compared to scales that provided indirect measures of the four individual components of CSE (Judge, Erez, Bono & Thoresen, 2003). The scale uses a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from (5) “strongly agree” to (1) “strongly disagree”. Each response was then coded on a scale from one to five and an average score for CSE was calculated.

Sphere of influence. The company provides an online marketing database to all salespeople. Some salespeople elect to use a similar database provided by an outside vendor. Virtually all salespeople attend training to learn how to use marketing databases, regardless of the vendor. The database typically contains names, contact information, contact records and other relevant information about the individuals that the salesperson knows (i.e. their SOI). The marketing database is attached to a customer relationship management system that allows the salesperson to send marketing material to the people in the database. Although salespeople typically update their database daily or weekly, the databases are known to vary in both size and completeness.

First, I obtained a numerical count of the number of people in their database, representing the first component of the definition of SOI, the number of first-level contacts in their SOI. Second, a numerical count of the interactions between the salesperson and the SOI was obtained. These interactions occur in multiple forms including, but not limited to, direct mail, electronic

mail and social media as well as face-to-face meetings and business transactions. When used properly, the customer relationship management system automatically tracks customer interactions. Using this system, the salesperson can report the number of interactions with the people in their database. This number was used to establish an estimate of the second component of the definition of SOI, the strength of the relationship between the salesperson and the SOI.

Finally, to represent the third component of the definition of SOI, an estimate of the influence or impact of the members of the SOI was developed. To accomplish this, a profile of the occupations of the individuals in the database was estimated, stratified by their perceived level of influence. Occupational status was used as a surrogate for the level of impact or influence that members of the SOI have on the people around them.

Several stratification models are available that are useful in evaluating occupational status. Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero (1979) proposed a scheme designed to allow them to study class mobility in Western European societies. Their model was indexed by the occupational and employment status of the participants. Originally, their model included 10 groupings of occupations. Subsequently, it has been used in various condensed forms with as few as three occupational groupings (Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero, 1979).

Ganzeboom, DeGraff and Treiman (1992) developed the International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI) to allow researchers to stratify various populations according to their occupational status. Their index was based upon the assertion that socio-economic index (SEI) scales capture the relationship between education, occupation and income. This relationship states that a person's education will influence the occupation they will pursue and the associated income they will earn. These SEI scales are constructed as a weighted sum of the average education and the average income of occupational groups, sometimes corrected for the influence of age. The

authors argue that in modern societies, education and income are forms of power. For this reason, one would expect that occupation, being the intermediate step connecting education to income, would provide a good indicator of the perceived power (influence) associated with the individuals within a SOI. Additionally, the study evaluated relationships between the ISEI scale and several versions of the Erickson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero (EGP) scale with correlation coefficients of 0.96 and 0.94, for the EGP10 scale (10 categories of occupations) and the EGP6 scale (the original 10 categories of occupations condensed to 6 categories), respectively. This indicates that either of these scales could be useful in the evaluation of occupational status in the study.

Ganzeboom and Treiman (1996) later evaluated three occupational grouping scales by comparing the Standard International Occupational Prestige Scale (SIOPS), their own International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) and the Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero (EGP) scale. They recommended a recoding scheme to allow researchers to make comparisons between studies using the three scales. Again, this study was based upon the proposal that education is related to income through occupation. Using their own ISEI scale, they restated the conclusion that education leads to occupation and occupation leads to income, finding correlation coefficients of 0.582 and 0.465 respectively for these two relationships. Their study indicated that all three scales are equally useful in explaining income attainment. Thus, they found all three scales to be correlated and useful in evaluating the impact of occupational status.

Despite the apparently sound theoretical basis for the occupational status component of SOI, I suspected that the occupational status data would be the most difficult to obtain from the salespeople. I assumed that each salesperson would know the occupation of people in their SOI

and have it recorded accurately in their customer relationship management system. However, after some preliminary screening, this was found to be an incorrect assumption. Therefore, to make the data more attainable, I asked each salesperson to provide a tally of the number of people within their SOI, stratified by major occupational category using the EGP6 scale.

To assess the validity of the estimates provided by the real estate salesperson, the plan was to have the data collectors select a representative sample and validate the salesperson's tally by working with the salesperson to assign the occupation to each individual within the SOI and compare it to the salesperson's tally. Upon further investigation, this turned out to be much more cumbersome than anticipated. I discovered that the salespeople did not have the occupational information readily available as hoped and that they were not as willing to go through the exercise as I had hoped. Regardless, I evaluated the occupational status tally provided by the salespeople and included it in the initial analysis to attempt to determine the usefulness of the concept. As it turned out, no evidence of any correlation between occupational status and other variables in the study was revealed. In consideration of the data integrity questions, the inability to confirm the self-reported estimates of occupational status groupings, and the lack of any relationship, I decided to eliminate it from further consideration in this study. My thoughts on further evaluation of this component of SOI will be discussed later in this paper.

Control variables. I collected additional data on the salespeople to allow us to control for demographic variables that were believed to be correlated with sales success. Two control variables were utilized in the analysis. I controlled for gender to allow for the industry being approximately two-thirds female (National Association of Realtors, 2016). According to industry statistics, females tend to engage in real estate sales more on a part-time basis than males and this imbalance in hours worked needed to be addressed (National Association of Realtors, 2016).

Additionally, I controlled for years of prior real estate experience to account for a possible reciprocal relationship. The reason I controlled for this variable is that I assumed that prior years of real estate experience would be related to sales success.

Sales performance. The salesperson's sales performance is measured by two different variables, each evaluated separately. The first sales performance variable is the number of written (but not closed) transactions in progress during the previous 12-month period. The use of written contracts eliminates the complication that occurs when real estate contracts are negotiated and agreed to, but not closed. The unclosed transactions are the result of influences such as financing, appraisals and negotiation of repairs that are largely outside of the control of the salesperson. The second measure of sales performance is the number of listings taken during the same period. This measure is widely considered to be a leading indicator of future sales. This sales performance data was available from the sales reports of the company.

Analytical procedures

Structural equation modeling with MPlus Version 8 (Muthen & Muthen, 2017) was used to examine the hypothesized model. Prior to examining the relationship between personality and sales performance, I first evaluated the factor structure of our scales using confirmatory factor analysis procedures. The hypothesized measurement model was evaluated and compared to several other measurement models to determine which measurement model fit the data the best. Following this, the means standard deviations, composite reliabilities, and intercorrelations among the variables were computed. Next, the hypothesized relationships between conscientiousness, extraversion, CSE and sales performance, as well as the mediating influence of the sphere of influence on these relationships were evaluated using structural equation modeling procedures.

RESULTS

Evaluation of Measurement Model

To evaluate the factor structure of the variables used in this study, a series of confirmatory factor models were tested. The first measurement model tested was the hypothesized 5-factor solution that included conscientiousness (CONS), extraversion (EXTR), core self-evaluations (CSE), sphere of influence (SOI), and sales performance (PERF) as separate factors. Two additional 4-factor models were evaluated, one combining CSE and conscientiousness and another combining CSE and extraversion. A 3-factor model combining all three personality variables was evaluated as well as a 1-factor model combining all of the variables in the study. The purpose of examining these additional measurement models is to determine the discriminant validity of the variables, establishing that they are distinguishable from one another. The fit estimates from the original hypothesized 5-factor model and the measurement models are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Summary of Measurement Model Fit for CFAs Examined

	X^2 (df)	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA
Hypothesized 5-factor model with direct and indirect effects	412.21***(242)	0.91	0.059	0.051
4-factor model combining CONS and CSE	511.36***(246)	0.86	0.071	0.064
4-factor model combining EXTR and CSE	671.20***(246)	0.77	0.086	0.080
3-factor model combining CONS, EXTR and CSE	770.32***(249)	0.72	0.092	0.089
1-factor model	1417.88***(252)	0.38	0.110	0.132

As can be seen in this table, the hypothesized 5-factor model produced a fit considerably better than the other models evaluated. Specifically, the original hypothesized 5-factor model produced a chi-squared (X^2) of 412.21 ($p < 0.01$) with 242 degrees of freedom. Three other measures of fit are included – the comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.90, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) of 0.07, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.05. The hypothesized 5-factor model produced a better fit than the alternative models based

upon each of these indicators of fit. Taken together, these findings suggest that the five focal variables included in this study are indeed distinguishable from each other.

Table 2 reports the factor loadings, composite reliabilities, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for the hypothesized 5-factor model. Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010) state that standardized factor-loading estimates should be 0.50 or higher. Table 2 illustrates that of the 20 items used for the three personality variables, 16 are above 0.50 and the other four are above 0.40, indicating that the majority of items loaded above the standard recommended by Hair et al. (2010). They also recommend composite reliability estimates of 0.70 or higher to have confidence in the fit.

The results reported in this table provide somewhat mixed evidence of the quality of the measures used in this study. On the positive side: (a) all factor loadings are significant ($p < 0.001$); (b) the composite reliabilities for extraversion, CSE, and sales performance are acceptable (> 0.70); and (c) the average variance explained (AVE) for the sales performance measure is above the suggested cutoff of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

However, on the negative side, the composite reliabilities for conscientiousness and SOI are below acceptable standards (< 0.70) and the AVE values for conscientiousness, CSE and SOI do not meet the Fornell and Larcker standard of 0.50. Therefore, although there have been a substantial number of studies that have validated the mini-IPIP scale for measuring conscientiousness and extraversion (Donnellan, Oswald, Baird & Lucas, 2006) as well as the core self-evaluations scale (Judge, Erez, Bono & Thoresen, 2003), they produced inconsistent fit measures in this study. Further, I was disappointed in the sphere of influence measures with both AVE and composite reliability estimates were below acceptable levels. Clearly, the scale used to measure the SOI construct will need further development.

Table 2 - Summary of Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Item	Standardized item loadings
Conscientiousness (CONS)	
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0.31
Composite reliability	0.64
1. I make a mess of things (r)	.50
2. I often forget to put things back in their proper place (r)	.60
3. I like order	.59
4. I get chores done right away	.52
Extraversion (EXTR)	
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0.49
Composite reliability	0.79
1. I don't talk a lot (r)	.77
2. I keep in the background (r)	.68
3. I talk to a lot of different people at parties	.67
4. I am the life of the party	.68
Core Self Evaluations (CSE)	
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0.28
Composite reliability	0.82
1. I am confident I get the success I deserve in life	.42
2. Sometimes I feel depressed (r)	.58
3. When I try, I generally succeed	.43
4. Sometimes when I fail I feel worthless (r)	.54
5. I complete tasks successfully	.41
6. Sometimes, I do not feel in control of my work (r)	.51
7. Overall, I am satisfied with myself	.60
8. I am filled with doubts about my competence (r)	.68
9. I determine what will happen in my life	.49
10. I do not feel in control of my success in my career (r)	.52
11. I am capable of coping with most of my problems	.50
12. There are times when things look pretty bleak and hopeless to me (r)	.62
Sphere of Influence (SOI)	
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0.37
Composite reliability	0.48
1. Number of people in SOI	.80
2. Relationship strength/Number of contacts	.33
Sales performance (PERF)	
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0.95
Composite reliability	0.97
1. Number of written contracts (past 12 months)	.99
2. Number of listings taken (past 12 months)	.94

Means, Standard Deviations, Composite Reliabilities and Variable Intercorrelations

Table 3 displays and the means, standard deviations, composite reliabilities and intercorrelations of the variables included in this study. Preliminary analysis of this table reveals some interesting relationships. The highest correlation shown is the relationship between sphere of influence and sales performance ($r = 0.49$). This indicates that the sphere of influence construct is clearly worth understanding as we move forward in this study and future research. Two of the more substantial correlations are found between the number of years of real estate sales experience and both sphere of influence ($r = 0.39$) and sales performance ($r = 0.45$). Although it would seem logical that the amount of time spent in a sales role would eventually produce both a larger sphere of influence and higher sales performance, a reciprocal relationship might also exist. For example, it could be that a real estate salesperson needs to be more successful at developing a sphere of influence and performing at a higher sales level to be able to stay active for any length of time in a commission-based sales role such as real estate.

Also of note are the relationships between CSE and conscientiousness ($r = 0.24$) and extraversion ($r = 0.20$). This is probably not surprising, since a person who displays the traits found in conscientiousness and extraversion might also have a positive self-concept.

Table 3 - Means, Standard Deviations, Composite Reliabilities and Variable Intercorrelations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender (0 = female; 1 = male)	0.37	0.48							
2. No. years real estate experience	7.21	6.02	0.07						
3. Conscientiousness	3.8	0.80	0.08	0.08	(0.64)				
4. Extraversion	3.4	1.00	0.11	-0.03	-0.13	(0.79)			
5. Core self-evaluations	3.9	0.50	-0.12	0.13	0.24	0.20	(0.82)		
6. Sphere of Influence	330	240	-0.06	0.39	-0.09	0.15	0.19	(0.48)	
7. Sales performance	20.6	29.2	-0.02	0.45	-0.07	0.08	0.16	0.49	(0.97)

Note: Composite reliabilities are reported in parentheses on the diagonal. Correlations with an absolute value greater than or equal to 0.15 are significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Further, CSE was positively correlated with sphere of influence ($r = 0.19$) and sales performance ($r = 0.16$). Again, it is understandable that someone with a positive self-concept would be more effective at developing a sphere of influence and exhibiting higher levels of sales performance. Somewhat surprisingly, conscientiousness produced small negative correlations with both sphere of influence and sales performance. I will address this issue in more detail later in the paper. Extraversion produced a small positive correlation with both sphere of influence and sales performance.

Evaluation of Structural Model

To evaluate the hypothesized relationships between the three personality variables, sphere of influence, and sales performance, two structural models were examined with controls in place for the effect of gender and number of years of real estate experience. The first model evaluated was the hypothesized model (Model A) including the direct effects of the personality variables on sales performance, as well as the indirect effects of these variables on sales performance, mediated by SOI, while controlling for the effects of gender and the number of years of prior real estate experience (Model A). The second model (Model B) was evaluated including only the indirect effects of the personality variables on sales performance, fully mediated through SOI. The results of these two analyses are reported in Table 4.

Table 4 - Model Descriptions and Comparisons

Model	Substantive Interpretation	Goodness of Fit		Chi-square Differences		Normed Chi-square	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA
		χ^2	<i>df</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	χ^2/df			
A	Hypothesized model (i.e., direct and mediated effects, WITH control variables)	487.65***	287	-	-	1.70	.90	.065	.051
B	Final model (i.e., with mediated indirect effects only and WITH control variables)	489.98***	290	2.33	3	1.69	.90	.066	.051

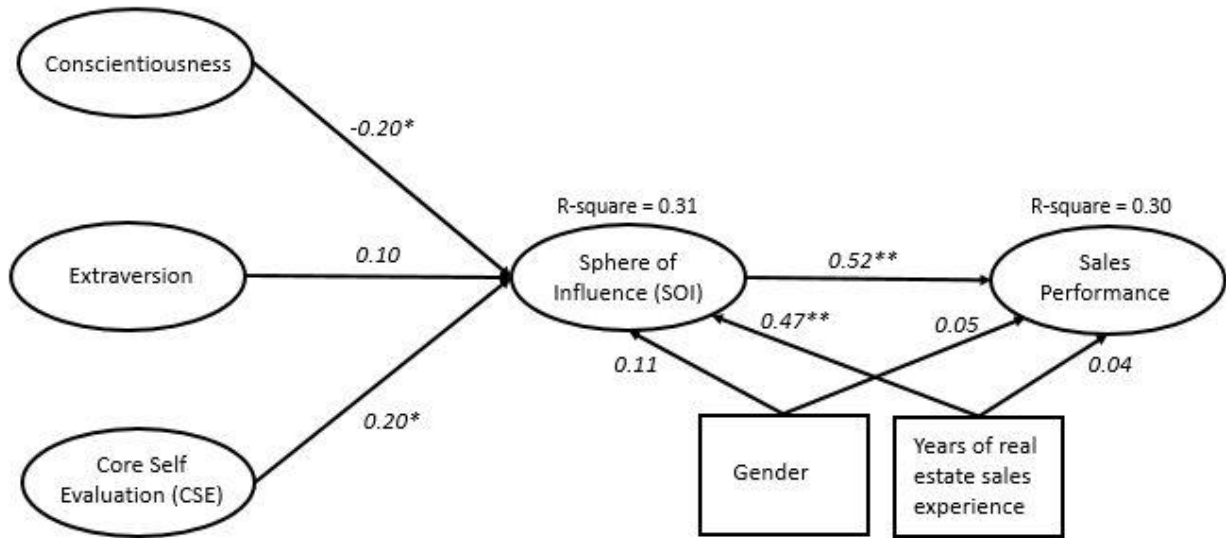
Table 4 reveals that Model A ($X^2=487.65$, $df=287$, $CFI=0.90$, $SRMR=0.065$, $RMSEA=0.051$) which is the hypothesized model that controls for gender and prior real estate experience, fits the data well. Model B ($X^2=489.98$, $df=290$, $CFI=0.90$, $SRMR=0.066$ and $RMSEA=0.051$), which removes the direct effects of the personality variables with sales performance and controls for gender and prior real estate experience, with essentially comparable SRMR, CFI and RMSEA values, provides a similarly good fit.

Given the similarity in fit indices between Model A and Model B, the application of the parsimony principle is warranted. Parsimony is typically operationalized when two models have similar fit indices and the one with fewer free parameters and more degrees of freedom are preferred (Muliak, 1998; Raykov & Marcoulides, 1999). The application of the principle of parsimony allows a researcher to typically select simpler models thus creating more stability in estimates and a higher likelihood of the model withstanding rejection (Raykov & Marcoulides, 1999). The observation of small intercorrelations between the personality variables and sales performance shown in Table 3, combined with the application of the parsimony principle, lead me to conclude that Model B is preferred. Thus, the direct effects of the personality variables with sales performance are eliminated from the model indicating that Hypotheses H1a, H2a and H3a are not supported.

The parameter estimates for our Final Model (Model B), are shown in Figure 3. As illustrated in this figure, conscientiousness was found to have a negative relationship with sphere of influence and therefore hypothesis H1b is not supported. Additionally, extraversion was not found to be related to SOI and therefore hypothesis H2b was also not supported. Finally, consistent with our expectation, the CSE personality variable has a positive relationship with SOI, thereby affirming hypothesis H1c. Taken together, the personality variables

(conscientiousness, extraversion and CSE) and the control variables (gender and years of real estate experience) explain 31% of the variance in sphere of influence ($R^2=0.31$). In addition, a salesperson’s sphere of influence and the control variables explain 30% of the variance in sales performance ($R^2=0.30$).

Figure 3: Final Model with Control Variables



* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Analysis of Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects

A summary of the direct, indirect and total effects of the final model is presented in Table 5. Consistent with hypothesis H4, sphere of influence has a positive direct effect on sales performance (0.52). In addition, both conscientiousness (-0.10, $p < .05$) and CSE (0.10, $p < .05$) had indirect effects on sales performance through their effects on sphere of influence. However, contrary to expectations, the overall effect of conscientiousness on sales performance through SOI was negative. In addition, extraversion was not found to have any indirect (or overall) effect on sales performance. Thus, taken together, Hypothesis 5 only received mixed support.

Table 5 - Summary of Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of the Final Model

Predictor	Sales Performance		
	Direct	Indirect	Total
Conscientiousness		-0.10*	-0.10*
Extraversion		0.05	0.05
Core self-evaluations		0.10*	0.10*
Sphere of influence	0.52**		0.52**

Note: *P<0.05, **P<0.01, one-tail test

Supplementary Analysis

In contrast to previous research, I found no evidence that the personality variables included in this study had any appreciable relationship with sales performance. Although it is not clear why this was the case, one possible explanation of these findings is that these variables interacted with each other to influence a salesperson's performance. For example, it is possible that a salesperson needs to be both conscientious and extraverted in order to have a direct effect upon sales performance. Alternatively, it is possible that the salesperson needs to be both extraverted and exhibit high CSE in order to produce higher levels of sales performance. Therefore, in a supplementary analysis, I evaluated the interactive effects of all possible combinations of the three personality variables, to determine if any of these combinations produced a noticeable direct effect on sales performance. However, none of the interactive effects was found to have a significant effect on sales performance.

DISCUSSION

Table 6 summarizes the conclusions regarding each of the hypothesized relationships. As can be seen in the table, none of the hypotheses directly linking the personality variables of conscientiousness, extraversion and CSE with sales performance (H1a, H2a, and H3a) were supported. Although this finding is surprising in light of previous studies, it does support our later hypothesis regarding the mediating effect of SOI.

Table 6 -A Summary of Support for Hypotheses

Hypothesis Number	Description of Hypothesis	Finding
H1a H1b	CONS positive direct effect on sales PERF CONS positive direct effect on SOI	Not supported Not supported, CONS had a negative effect on SOI
H2a H2b	EXTR positive direct effect on sales PERF EXTR positive direct effect on SOI	Not supported Not supported
H3a H3b	CSE positive direct effect on sales PERF CSE positive direct effect on SOI	Not supported Supported
H4	SOI positively related to sales PERF	Supported
H5	SOI will partially mediate relationship between CONS, EXTR, CSE and sales PERF	Partial support –SOI fully mediated the relationships between CONS and CSE and PERF. However, unexpectedly, the indirect effect of CONS on sales performance through SOI was negative.

Hypothesis H1b, predicting a positive direct effect of conscientiousness on sphere of influence, was not supported. In fact, conscientiousness had a negative direct effect on sphere of influence in this study. We will address this result later in the paper. Hypothesis H2b, predicting that extraversion would have a positive direct effect on sphere of influence, did not exhibit a statistically significant relationship and is not supported. Only CSE was found to have a positive direct effect on sphere of influence (H3b). This relationship between the CSE and sphere of influence is consistent with the hypotheses that salespeople with an overall positive self-concept should attract people to themselves, thereby creating a larger sphere of influence.

The hypothesized direct relationship between sphere of influence and sales performance (H4) was fully supported. This indicates that a salesperson who knows more people and has stronger relationships with that group of people tend to achieve higher sales performance than a salesperson with fewer people and weaker relationships. Also, although our hypothesis stated that sphere of influence would be a partial mediator of the relationship between the personality

variables and sales performance (H5), sphere of influence was shown to be a full mediator of the relationships between conscientiousness and CSE and sales performance. This finding is significant in that prior studies of the relationship between personality and sales performance have not addressed this mediating construct. Stated simply, this finding suggests that developing a sphere of influence seems to be a critical component of sales success. A salesperson that can develop relationships with other influential people, and succeed in managing an ever-increasing number of these relationships, will have a higher probability of succeeding in a sales role.

It is my belief that the lack of a direct positive relationship between conscientiousness and extraversion and sales performance is partially related to the lack of validity of the Mini-IPIP scale in this application. The CSE scale, with more diversity in the items, and designed to address all four facets of CSE, produced results more consistent with previous studies.

I will first discuss the negative relationship between conscientiousness and SOI illustrated in this study. In contrast with the substantial conscientiousness research outlined earlier in my literature review and comprehensively reviewed by Barrick, Mount & Judge (2001) in a meta-analysis of 15 previous meta-analytic studies, the data in our study indicated that a negative relationship exists between conscientiousness and SOI. Although not significant, the correlation between conscientiousness and sales performance was also negative. In the absence of any logical reason for this finding, I decided to look more closely at the various scales used for measuring the components that make up the Five Factor Model of personality.

The NEO Personality Inventory is a comprehensive scale with 240 items divided into thirty facets, six for each of the five personality variables (Costa, McRae & Dye, 1991; Costa, McRae & Kay, 1995). The six facets of the conscientiousness variable are competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation. In contrast, the Mini-IPIP

scale, being designed for easy completion, only contains 20 items for the five personality variables, leaving only four items for the conscientious personality variable. Upon closer inspection of the four items in the Mini-IPIP devoted to conscientiousness, I found that three of the items were primarily focused on the facet of order and one item was focused on the facet of dutifulness. To be successful in a sales role, the conscientiousness facets of competence, achievement striving and self-discipline might also be required. These are not specifically addressed in the Mini-IPIP scale. For this reason, it may be more appropriate to conclude that a negative relationship exists between only two of the five facets of conscientiousness, order and dutifulness, and SOI.

Similarly, the Mini-IPIP uses only four items to measure extraversion. Two of these items are related to talking and two are related to excitement seeking. In the NEO Personality Inventory mentioned earlier, six facets of extraversion are measured. They are warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement seeking, and positive emotions. The Mini-IPIP scale seems to address only gregariousness and excitement seeking. It is likely that the facets of assertiveness, activity and positive emotions would be helpful in establishing relationships in the sphere of influence context in this study.

This leads me to several conclusions. First, the Mini-IPIP assessment tool, while typically providing a quick and easy-to-use assessment for the FFM personality variables, was probably not the appropriate assessment tool to use for a study of this type. Clearly, more diligence was necessary in the evaluation of this scale for use in this study. Second, it could be that the conscientiousness facet of orderliness is negatively correlated with both SOI and sales performance in the real estate sales context. Virtually nothing about the real estate sales process is orderly. Therefore, it could be concluded that salespeople that are more orderly will struggle in

a real estate sales role. Third, of some concern is the idea that within the conscientiousness variable are facets that could be working against each other in certain contexts. It is possible that measures of conscientiousness have both negative and positive components. Although not the concern of this study, evidence of this phenomenon has been suggested in previous studies, particularly in the context of a sales role (Dudley, Orvis, Lebiecki & Cortina, 2006). Finally, it seems that the extraversion facets of assertiveness and positive emotion should be included in our assessment of personality. Certainly, assertiveness should lead to a more effective development of a sphere of influence as well as higher sales performance. Like CSE, positive emotions should also be more predictive of the sphere of influence construct.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several opportunities for future research. First, of obvious importance is the correct measurement of the three personality variables. Specifically, another study might include a more comprehensive assessment of the conscientiousness and extraversion personality variables using the NEO Personality Inventory or its equivalent. An assessment tool which focuses on the conscientiousness facets of competence, achievement striving and self-discipline might prove to be more fruitful and produce a positive relationship between conscientiousness and SOI and sales performance. Similarly, an assessment tool that includes the extraversion facets of assertiveness and positive emotions might also provide results that are more fruitful.

There are also interesting possibilities for completing a qualitative study. In-depth interviews with salespeople that are performing at a high level, as well as interviews with salespeople that are struggling, might produce some valuable insights into the sphere of influence construct. In-depth discussions about salespeople's marketing database, the methods of building relationships and the overall importance placed upon the SOI could also help us clarify the

definition of the first two components of our construct. Additional information about the types of individuals in their sphere of influence could give us the ability to better define the third component of our construct, that being the influence of the individuals within the sphere of influence. A detailed social network analysis, similar to the one shown in Figure 1, while somewhat cumbersome and time consuming, might produce insight into this third component. I believe that although this will be difficult to complete due to the time required on the part of the participants, it may assist in formulating a more accurate definition of the sphere of influence construct.

Another interesting study might include the observation of SOI development over time relative to sales development over time. This could lead to the discovery of causal effects. Changes in each of the three components of the sphere of influence construct could be monitored. For example, there may be a more precise way of quantifying the impact of the frequency of interaction between the salesperson and the SOI. It may be that certain types of interactions may prove to be more productive in generating sales than others. The observation of a change in the sphere of influence and its relation to a lagged change in sales performance could give us an indication of the causal relationship between the individual components of sphere of influence as well as the total construct, and sales performance.

Obviously, repeating this study in different contexts would be helpful. A similar sampling of insurance agents, mortgage bankers, and other salespeople might provide interesting comparisons. The obvious drawback to this series of studies would be finding a population that would be willing to share sensitive data that supports their sales business.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

There are several implications for practitioners. In many sales organizations, the hiring process frequently contains a component of personality assessment. This study shows that personality variables only affect sales performance through the sphere of influence. Thus, it is possible that human resource managers and sales managers would be better served to spend time during the hiring process attempting to determine the quality of a candidate's existing sphere of influence or their ability to network and develop a sphere of influence from which sales can be generated.

Additionally, once a new salesperson has been hired, the initial training might be better directed toward social networking and developing a sphere of influence. Frequently, the initial training of new salespeople includes significant components of product and customer knowledge. Concurrently, the training of salespeople should include a component of networking skills. The development of a database of names from which the salesperson can hope to generate sales leads is imperative. Further, the salesperson's developing relationship with the people in the database can be measured through the quantity and quality of the interactions between the salesperson and the people in the sphere of influence database. Clearly, the faster the number of names in the database grows, combined with the strengthening of the relationships through frequent and high quality interactions, the higher the probability of improved sales performance.

From a sales force management perspective, measuring the development of a salesperson's sphere of influence would provide a good leading indicator of future sales performance. Salespeople who were actively growing their sphere of influence should have a higher likelihood of improved performance in the future.

In individual performance (i.e., not employer-employee relationships) or commission-based sales roles, a salesperson will need to make an honest determination about their ability to

succeed in the sales role based on their ability to build a sphere of influence. There are very large numbers of sales roles in industries such as real estate, mortgage banking, stock brokerage, automobile dealerships, insurance and other similar roles. The ability to build a sphere of influence that will eventually generate sales becomes the primary leading indicator of success for aspiring salespeople in these industry segments.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study has several limitations. Of primary concern is that although prior studies have shown personality variables to be positively correlated to job performance, this study did not produce similar results. As discussed earlier, there is some concern about the use of the Mini-IPIP assessment tool in this context. In perfect 20/20 hindsight, it might have been better to create a survey that contained more questions about the personality variables of conscientiousness and extraversion and less questions about real estate practices that were not relevant to the study. Specifically, as it relates to conscientiousness, more questions about competence, achievement striving, and self-discipline might have been more appropriate in this context and may have produced stronger correlations. Additionally, as it relates to extraversion, more questions about assertiveness and positive emotions might have produced stronger correlations.

A second limitation of this study is the full development of the sphere of influence construct. Theoretically and practically, it makes sense that the number of people in a sphere of influence combined with the strength of the relationship between the individuals in the sphere of influence and the salesperson would result in enhanced sales performance. Although this study produced an initial view of the relationship, further clarification of these two components of our sphere of influence definition is probably warranted. Further, our survey contained multiple-

choice answers requiring the respondent to select a range for each of the components of our sphere of influence construct. It may be more appropriate to ask the respondents to give an actual number to make the data more usable in establishing statistical relationships.

Theoretically, I remain convinced that the third component of our sphere of influence construct, that being the level of influence exhibited collectively by the individual members of a salesperson's sphere of influence, should create the potential for more numerous sales opportunities. Although our attempt to use occupational status as a surrogate for influence had some theoretical basis, the actual results were disappointing. We will need to improve both our definition of this component of our construct and our ability to collect the data to measure it. Clearly, this limitation will need attention in future studies.

Finally, the overall survey response rate of 12% was disappointing. The initial surveys were sent to real estate offices with extensive knowledge of me personally and some knowledge of my study. The real estate salespeople in these offices likely responded in an effort to assist me personally. These offices had a response rate of 33%. In an effort to create a larger sample, I sent additional surveys to offices with less knowledge of me personally and essentially no knowledge of my study. Although the managers of those offices committed to assisting and promoting the study, the response rate in those offices was extremely low. Revisions to the survey combined with more committed managerial support should improve the response rate in future studies.

CONCLUSION

It was the intent of this study to examine the relationships between the personality characteristics of conscientiousness, extraversion and core self-evaluations and a salesperson's ability to create a sphere of influence from which sales can be generated. I presented theoretical arguments supporting the belief that the behaviors displayed by salespeople with high levels of these three personality characteristics should attract people into the salesperson's sphere of

influence thereby increasing sales performance. The concepts of prosocial behavior, reciprocity and social capital theory provide a theoretical basis for the hypothesis that salespeople who develop a larger and more committed SOI should create a situation wherein the individuals within the SOI will provide increased opportunities for sales. By studying the sphere of influence of individual salespeople and correlating it with their personality and their actual sales performance, insight was gained about the personality characteristics required of individuals seeking a career in sales. This information can be used for recruiting, selection, training, coaching and administration of salespeople.

There are several contributions that this study makes to the literature. First, it challenges the impact that personality has on sales performance using quantitative measures of sales results and outcomes. Second, it is the first study to evaluate the effect of personality on SOI and SOI on sales performance. Having found a fully mediating effect, I can make recommendations regarding hiring policies or other managerial practices that will result in higher levels of salesperson success. Third, to my knowledge, it is the first attempt to define and study the SOI construct as it relates to salespeople. Although I did not confirm that my definition of SOI is totally correct, I did find that the SOI construct may be useful in many new avenues of study of salesperson performance. The strong effect that SOI has on sales performance is an interesting discovery. Accordingly, there are likely additional components of the SOI construct that are worthy of further investigation.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Steven D. Tufts is an accomplished business owner and investor who splits time between Gainesville and Jacksonville, FL. He has a Bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Florida and an MBA from the University of Virginia. He has completed all course work and pending final approval of his dissertation, he will receive his DBA from the University of Florida in August 2017.

After a successful 20-year corporate career that included executive positions at companies like Progressive Insurance and Anthem, Inc. as well as a CEO position with a specialty insurance company in Atlanta, Steve became a self-employed entrepreneur. Having spent much of his corporate career acquiring, merging and turning around distressed businesses, he focused on a similar strategy in his entrepreneurial pursuits. Since acquiring his first business in 1998, Steve and various partners have started or acquired over 20 businesses.

As a part of his entrepreneurial strategy, he received his real estate license in 2001 and spent several years as a small business merger and acquisition intermediary. Concurrently, he joined Keller Williams Realty as the Co-Founder of Tufts Realty Associates, an Atlanta-based luxury homes team that closed \$200 million in residential real estate in its first 6 years. Steve is currently the Operating Partner/Owner of the Atlantic Partners Group of Keller Williams Realty offices with 9 locations and over 800 real estate agents throughout North Florida. He is a member of the KW University International Master Faculty, an owner of a Jacksonville area title company and a mentor for many aspiring entrepreneurs.

In his spare time, he enjoys golf, cycling, music and anything that puts him on, in or near salt water. He is married to the former Barbara Thompson and has 3 adult daughters.