Examining the link between salesperson networking behaviors, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment: Does gender matter?

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ABSTRACT

Sales professionals are embedded in an array of social interactions through their networking behaviors, yet the literature’s understanding of these effects on job-based attitudes is relatively limited. Further, research suggests that men and women, not only network differently, but also often benefit in different ways from networking. This study examines the extent to which gender moderates the relationships between three forms of salesperson networking behaviors, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The data from a survey of 179 salespeople indicates that networking behaviors are related to job satisfaction and commitment in sales. However, the relationships vary for male and female salespeople. When analyzed separately, job satisfaction relates positively to professional networking for women, while job satisfaction relates positively to peer networking for men. In addition, peer networking directly relates to organizational commitment for women, rather than mediated by job satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decades, increasing numbers of women have established careers in professional sales. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women comprised approximately 49.6% of all positions within sales and sales related occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). This trend stimulated a fair amount of research examining potential differences in attitudes and behavior between male and female salespeople. Research examining the direct effects of gender has produced somewhat mixed results (e.g., Moncrief, Babakus, Cravens, & Johnston, 2000). An alternative approach is to examine how gender moderates the relationships between key antecedents, work attitudes, and outcomes (e.g., Babin & Boles, 1998; Boles, Wood, & Johnson, 2003). These studies suggest that even though there may not be many differences in global constructs (e.g., overall job satisfaction), there may be differences in the nature and strength of relationships between key constructs based on gender.

One salesperson attitude of particular interest is job satisfaction (e.g., Brown & Peterson, 1993), because of its links to organizational commitment and turnover intentions (Boles, Madupalli, Rutherford, & Wood, 2007). An extensive body of research has identified a number of major categories of antecedents of job satisfaction (Churchill, Ford, Hartley, & Walker, 1985; Verbeke, Dietz, & Verwaal, 2011). However, research on job satisfaction has largely ignored the potential of social influences inherent within the sales profession (Hurlbert, 1991; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). With the exception of research on the effects of workplace isolation (Marshall, Michaels, & Mulki, 2007) and some research on friendships (e.g., Swan, Goodwin, Mayo, & Richardson, 2001), little research has been devoted to effects of social interactions in sales. This lack of empirical research on the link between social influences and job satisfaction creates a gap within the literature, as the value of developing and nurturing relationships has been highly regarded within the personal selling and marketing literature (Palmatier, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 2007).

As the sales profession continues to evolve toward a role in which the salesperson is embedded in an array of social interactions (Bradford et al., 2010), critical skills such as networking are essential (Bradford & Weitz, 2012). However, scholars note the lack of research focused on networking behaviors in the sales literature (Flaherty, Lam, Lee, Mulki, & Dixon, 2012; Seevers, Skinner, & Kelley, 2007). This is unfortunate, as networking behavior, individuals’ attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career (Forret & Dougherty, 2001), is an important career skillset (Todd, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009) and a proactive approach to personal growth and development (Thompson, 2005). Since the literature suggests potential differences in both how men and women network and in how they may benefit from networking behavior (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Van Emmerik, Euwema, Geschiere, & Schouten, 2006), research on potential differences in sales would be beneficial.
Therefore, the model in this study links three common forms of networking behaviors to salesperson job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and specifically examines the extent to which gender moderates these relationships (Fig. 1). The study contributes to the literature by examining an under-researched but important set of sales behaviors (networking), their impacts on key attitudes and outcomes, and potential differences for male and female salespeople.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Networking behaviors and job satisfaction

Forret and Dougherty (2001, p. 283) define networking behavior as “individuals’ attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career.” Networking behavior captures the investment that people make in developing and maintaining relationships. People benefit from these relationships because it increases their “access to task-related, career, and emotional coping resources” (Van Emmerik, 2006). For example, sales research shows that internal networking can increase access to expertise, improve task performance, and ultimately improve overall performance (Stewart, Walker, Hutt, & Kumar, 2010; Üstüner & Iacobucci, 2012).

At work, co-workers or peers provide social support (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), which can reduce job stress and promote security and positive moods (Rego & Cunha, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Peer networking can facilitate salesperson socialization, thereby leading to clearer role perceptions and expectations (Podolny & Baron, 1997). By providing resources such as advice, instruction, and assistance, coworkers can help reduce employee role ambiguity, conflict, and overload (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), all factors considered to have negative impacts on job satisfaction (Ford, Walker, & Churchill, 1979). Networking within one’s own organization can enhance that individual’s reputation (Stewart et al., 2010) leading to higher status and feelings of career success (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Specifically in sales, Marshall et al. (2007) found a significant negative correlation between perceived workplace isolation and job satisfaction. This finding adds support to the contention that effort to connect with peers is likely to impact job satisfaction. Based on this discussion, the first hypothesis argues that a positive association exists between peer networking and job satisfaction.

H1. There is a positive relationship between peer networking behavior and salesperson job satisfaction.

External networking behaviors targeting other professionals may also enhance job satisfaction. Hence, the model incorporates networking with other professionals as the second antecedent. Professional networking behaviors provide access to useful non-redundant sources of information, such as best practices and business trends (Chang, 2005). For salespeople, Hartmann, Rutherford, Hamwi, and Friend (2012) suggest that professional associations can provide access to external mentors. Participating in professional organizations may increase feelings of professionalism and self-efficacy (Clarke, 2011). Involvement in professional organizations may also enhance reputation and status in a broader arena leading to feelings of greater career success (Forret & Dougherty, 2004).

H2. There is a positive relationship between professional networking behavior and salesperson job satisfaction.

The third hypothesis examines the development and maintenance of relationships with customers, customer networking. The literature suggests that customer networking can also impact salesperson job satisfaction. Two recent studies provide evidence that greater interaction with people outside of one’s own organization is significantly related to job satisfaction (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Since salespeople are boundary spanners, their role sets include people outside of their organizations, who also act as role senders (Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981). Therefore, in the same sense that peers aid the socialization process and clearer role perceptions, customers may also assist in this process. Customers serve as an important source of feedback. Greater interaction with customers is also likely to provide more access to important information and other job-related resources (Üstüner & Godes, 2006). Swan et al. (2001) found that some customers are more like coworkers, thus providing some of the same resources and benefits as real co-workers within one’s own organization. This may be particularly important in sales, as many salespeople have limited face-to-face interaction with peers in their own organizations (Marshall et al., 2007).

H3. There is a positive relationship between customer networking behavior and salesperson job satisfaction.

2.2. Networking behavior and gender differences

While network behaviors may be beneficial to both men’s and women’s career success, the literature suggests potential differences in both how men and women network and in how they may benefit (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Social role theory provides a framework.
for examining potential differences in networking behavior (Van Emmerik et al., 2006). According to this theory, important differences between men and women exist in the agentic-communal dimensions of roles (Eagly, 1987). Agentic qualities align more with the male role, while communal qualities align more with the female role. Based on this perspective, men tend to have more instrumental attitudes, while women have more emotional, expressive attitudes. The male role encourages strength, independence, and competitiveness, while the female role is more communal (nurturing, relational, and sensitive to others). Thus, male networking also tends to be more instrumental (task oriented, goal oriented, and get-to-business), while females tend to be more relational (build a relationship). Historically, the consensus of research suggests that women benefit less from career investments than men do (e.g., Morrison & Von Glionow, 1990; Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992). Early research also suggests a number of reasons why women may benefit less from networking behaviors (e.g., Ibarra, 1992). Contextual factors in organizations, such as fewer same sex contacts and unequal hierarchical distribution by gender create constraints that limit females’ opportunities to access benefits through networking behaviors (Ibarra, 1992, 1993). Research findings generally support this inequity for career outcomes, such as number of promotions and total compensation (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Gender differences in relation to job satisfaction have not received as much research attention, but there is evidence to suggest that men and women may benefit more or less in different ways for various forms of networking behavior. For example, Van Emmerik (2006, p. 26) suggests that men tend to specialize more in acquiring “hard social capital,” such task related benefits, while women tend to specialize in “soft social capital,” such as emotional support. Some research suggests that men may garner greater satisfaction from networking tied to their peers than their female counter-parts. As noted by other marketing research (Babin & Boles, 1998), a difference in the relationship across genders may evince itself due to the agentic-communal dimension of sex differences (Eagly, 1987; Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1993). That is, males display a distinct difference in their networking behaviors (Ibarra, 1992, 1993). Research findings generally support this inequality for career outcomes, such as number of promotions and total compensation (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Gender differences in relation to job satisfaction have not received as much research attention, but there is evidence to suggest that men and women may benefit more or less in different ways for various forms of networking behavior. For example, Van Emmerik (2006, p. 26) suggests that men tend to specialize more in acquiring “hard social capital,” such task related benefits, while women tend to specialize in “soft social capital,” such as emotional support.

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H4. The positive relationship between peer networking and jobs satisfaction is moderated by gender, such that it is stronger among men than among women.

In contrast, results of a recent study (Misner, Walker, & De Raffele, 2011) suggest that women may indeed benefit more than men in certain forms of networking. Some research suggests that women may benefit from external networking, as it provides opportunities to connect with more same sex peers, mentors, and role models that are not available within one’s own organization (Clarke, 2011). In effect, professional networking may enhance the communal dimension of sex differences (Eagly, 1987; Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1993). As such, professional networking allows women to participate and expand their professional community. There is also evidence to suggest that women may simply look at the value of networking differently than men. For example, Ackah and Heaton’s (2004) research indicates that women are more likely to attribute career success to external influences, such as professional networking, while men are more likely to attribute success to internal factors (e.g., ambition). Summarizing, some research suggests that networking outside of the organization may have a greater impact on job satisfaction for women than for men.

H5. The positive relationship between professional networking and job satisfaction is moderated by gender, such that it is stronger among women than among men.

Previous research seemingly suggests two conflicting arguments regarding the relationship between customer networking and job satisfaction. The first argument suggests that the relationship between customer networking and job satisfaction will be stronger among men than among women. Due to the agentic nature of the male role, men have greater aspirations for success (Gibson & Swan, 1981). As such, interacting with customers may effectively re-affirm these life goals and thus lead to job satisfaction. The second argument suggests that structural differences may not exist between the genders on the relationship between customer networking and satisfaction. As Babin and Boles (1998, p. 79) note, “the work role and its prescriptive attachments often override behavioral or attitudinal differences attributable to gender.” Thus, the expectation of being customer-driven within the sales role would effectively nullify any distinction between genders. Research appears to support this argument, as Boles et al. (2003) did not find any significant gender differences for the relationship between role stressors and satisfaction with the customer. As the authors noted (Boles et al., 2003, p. 109), the “results may indicate that these respondents as boundary-spanners by nature have a customer orientation.” Similarly, other research has demonstrated no significant differences between the genders for customer-based behaviors, such as adaptive selling (Levy & Sharma, 1994). Thus, the role and occupational expectations of serving as a customer-focused salesperson may diminish manifestation of gender-based tendencies, thus minimizing potential differences between men and women.

H6. Gender does not moderate the relationship between customer networking and job satisfaction.

2.3. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment

Theory and extensive empirical evidence (e.g., Brown & Peterson, 1993; Johnston, Parasuraman, Futrell, & Black, 1990), suggest that salesperson job satisfaction is positively related to organizational commitment. Based on the agentic, competitive nature of male roles, it is expected that job satisfaction will “have a greater effect on organizational commitment of men than women since the job may be more central to the male salesperson’s view of his societal role.” (Boles et al., 2007, p. 313). Support for this contention is found in Babin and Boles (1998) and McNeilly and Goldsmith (1991).

H7. There is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

H8. The positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment is moderated by gender, such that it is stronger for men than for women.
2.4. Networking and organizational commitment

The final set of hypotheses suggests a direct effect between peer networking and organizational commitment. Specifically, peer networking may provide salespeople with a sense of support within the organization. This sense of support has been found to enhance the level of organizational commitment (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Through peer networking, the salesperson may have greater access to information resources and feel a sense of solidarity within the organization among their colleagues (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Burt, 1992). Hence, a strong degree of internal networking (i.e. peer networking) may enable salespeople to have a better understanding of the firm and their role and thereby enhance their identification and commitment to the organization.

H9. There is a positive relationship between peer networking and organizational commitment.

Based on a literature review, peer networking may not only play a role in enhancing organizational commitment, but also be moderated by gender. Research suggests, in part, that women may display greater levels of organizational commitment than men do (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Russ & McNeilly, 1995). Distinct factors within the work environment may be uniquely important to women in terms of identifying and committing to the firm. For instance, women may perceive greater value in the social relationships with their colleagues (McNeilly & Goldsmith, 1991). In Boles et al. (2007), the correlation between satisfaction with co-workers and organizational commitment was more than twice as large for female salespeople (0.51), than it was for males (0.22). Research has found that the firm’s social milieu has some effect of women’s decision to continue to work for their firm (Weisberg & Kirschenbaum, 1993). Because peer networking, in effect, focuses on building relationships internally, this form of networking may be uniquely salient to women and be related to organizational commitment. As such, gender will likely moderate the relationship between peer networking and organizational commitment.

H10. The positive relationship between peer networking and organizational commitment is moderated by gender, such that it is stronger for women than for men.

3. Methods

3.1. Data collection

The sampling frame is a statewide commercial list of licensed real estate salespeople. Type of sales job and selling context is a concern in sales research, since sales jobs can vary considerably by industry. There are two reasons for choosing this context. First, real estate is an industry where there is gender balance; in fact, females have a slight majority (57%, the National Association of Realtors, 2010). This provides a stronger test of gender differences as it minimizes potential differences that may be an artifact of severe gender imbalance (e.g., tokenism) (Moncreiff et al., 2000). Secondly, real estate represents a significant segment of sales careers. Considering only real estate and similar sales jobs in insurance and financial services, there are over one million salespeople in the United States alone (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

Prior to the actual study, postcards were sent extending an invitation to participate in the internet study. This was followed by an email with the link for the study. This resulted in 179 useable responses, for an effective response rate of 10.3%. Of the 179 respondents, 91 were female.

3.2. Measures

The measures are multi-item scales (details provided in the Appendix B). Salesperson job satisfaction, consists of four items (reduced INSales) from Rutherford, Boles, Hamwi, Madupalli, and Rutherford (2009). The three items measuring organizational commitment also came from Rutherford et al. (2009). The networking scales were constructed using and adapting items from prior research (Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Michael & Yukl, 1993; Wolff & Moser, 2006). Means, standard deviations and correlations are reported in the Appendix A. In addition, the Appendix A contains Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct. Cronbach’s alphas ranged between .83 and .96, all exceeding an acceptable threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The composite reliabilities ranged from .81 to .96 exceeding the normal cutoff of .70. As well, the AVE values ranged from .52 to .87 meeting the minimum standard of .50. These tests suggest sufficient reliability and convergent validity. In addition, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in LISREL 9.1, which included the job satisfaction, organizational commitment, professional networking, customer networking, and peer networking variables. The results suggest good fit of the measurement model: \(X^2 (160) = 262.44\) (\(p = 0.000\)), \(CFI = 0.97\), \(IFI = 0.97 \) and \(RMSEA = 0.060\). The standardized factor loadings ranged from .58 to .96 with t-values from 7.2 to 24.3. Conventional checks for acquiescence bias did not reveal any problems.

4. Results

The hypotheses were tested in a SEM framework in LISREL 9.1. First, the general model was estimated linking the three forms of networking to job satisfaction and organizational commitment to test hypotheses H1–H3, H7 and H9, without consideration of potential gender differences. Again the results show a good fit between the hypothesized general model and the data \(X^2 (162) = 263.20\) (\(p = 0.000\)), \(CFI = 0.97\), \(IFI = 0.98\) and \(RMSEA = 0.059\). Hypotheses one (H1) and two (H2) are not supported, as the coefficients in the general model (Table 1) for the link between peer networking and job satisfaction and the link between professional networking and job satisfaction are not significant. The coefficient for customer networking is significant indicating support for hypothesis three (H3). As expected, the path from job satisfaction to organizational commitment is positive and significant, supporting hypothesis seven (H7). However, the coefficient for the direct path from peer networking to organizational commitment is not significant in the general model, failing to support H9.

Hypotheses H4, H5, and H6 examine potential moderation of the relationships between the three forms of networking behavior and job satisfaction based on gender. Hypothesis 8 (H8) examines gender moderation of the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Finally, hypothesis 10 (H10) predicts that gender will moderate the relationship between peer

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<td>Peer → job satisfaction</td>
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<td>Professional → job satisfaction</td>
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<td>Customer → job satisfaction</td>
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<td>Job satisfaction → org. comm.</td>
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<td>Peer → org. comm.</td>
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* p < 0.05.
networking and organizational commitment. These hypotheses are tested using multi-group analysis in LISREL. The first step in this analysis simultaneously examines separate models for women and men. The resulting global fit statistics indicate satisfactory fit with the data [χ² (324) = 595.71 (p = 0.000), CFI = 0.939, IFI = 0.940 and RMSEA = 0.0923]. The separate parameter estimates for men and women for the two-group model appear in Table 1.

Hypothesis 4 (H4) suggests that the relationship between peer networking and job satisfaction will be stronger for men than for women. Thus, a larger positive coefficient for men is predicted. The coefficients in Table 1 support this hypothesis. The coefficient for the path linking peer networking to job satisfaction for men is 0.33, p < 0.05, while the corresponding path for women is not significant (0.05, p > 0.05). A second test using nested equation models provides a more rigorous test of moderation. For this test, the two-group model described earlier was re-fit with the peer networking to job satisfaction path constrained to be equal across both groups. This model produced a χ² of 600.4 with 325° of freedom, and a constrained path coefficient of 0.17 (p < 0.05). The χ² difference test results in a Δχ² of 4.69 with Δ df 1, indicating a significantly diminished fit over the base model. This analysis adds further support for H4.

Hypothesis 5 (H5) predicts that the relationship between professional networking and job satisfaction will be stronger for women than for men. Evidence to support for this hypothesis would be a larger positive coefficient for women. The coefficients in Table 1 support this hypothesis. The coefficient for the path linking professional networking to job satisfaction for women is 0.58 with 325° of freedom, and a constrained path coefficient of 0.17 (p < 0.05). The χ² difference test results in a Δχ² of 4.69 with Δ df 1, indicating a significantly diminished fit over the base model. This analysis adds further support for H5.

Hypothesis 6 (H6) suggests that gender does not affect the relationship between customer networking and job satisfaction. Therefore, the positive coefficients should be equivalent for men and women. However, the coefficients in Table 1 are different. The coefficient for the path linking customer networking to job satisfaction for women is 0.23, p < 0.05, while the corresponding path for men is not significant (0.10, p > 0.05). Therefore, the initial analysis does not support H6. Again, a second test was conducted using nested equation models. For this test, the two-group model was again re-fit with the customer networking to job satisfaction path constrained to be equal across both groups. This model produced a χ² of 596.29 with 325° of freedom and the constrained path coefficient of 0.19 (p < 0.05). The χ² difference test between this model and the unconstrained model indicates a significantly poorer fit (Δχ² of 7.63 with Δ df 1), adding additional support for H5.

Hypothesis 8 (H8) predicts that the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment will be stronger for men than for women. Therefore, the positive coefficient linking satisfaction to organizational commitment should be larger for men. The coefficients in Table 1 support this hypothesis. The coefficient for the path linking job satisfaction to organizational commitment for men is 0.70, p < 0.05, while the corresponding path for women is 0.41, p > 0.05. A second test of moderation was conducted using nested equation models. For this test, the two-group model described earlier was re-fit with the job satisfaction to organizational commitment path constrained to be equal across both groups. This model produced a χ² of 598.77 with 325° of freedom and the constrained path coefficient of 0.52 (p < 0.05). The χ² difference test between this model and the unconstrained model results in a marginally significant reduced fit (Δχ² of 3.06 with Δ df 1, p < 0.10), providing some support for H8.

Hypothesis 10 (H10) predicts that the relationship between peer networking and organizational commitment will be stronger for women than men. The coefficients in Table 1 support this hypothesis. From the base two-group model (Table 1), the coefficient for the path linking peer networking to organizational commitment for men is not significant (0.01, p > 0.05), while the corresponding path for women is positive and significant (0.25, p < 0.05). A second test of moderation was conducted using nested equation models. For this test, the two-group model described earlier was re-fit with the peer networking to organizational commitment path constrained to be equal across both groups. This model produced a χ² of 598.77 with 325° of freedom and the constrained path coefficient of 0.08 (p > 0.05). The χ² difference test between this model and the unconstrained model did not result in significantly reduced fit (Δχ² of 1.46 with Δ df 1). Hypothesis 10 (H10) receives only partial support, as the more rigorous test did not support moderation.

One final model focuses specifically on differences in the relationships between peer networking, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment based on gender. The final model tested includes only a direct path from peer networking to organizational commitment for women and only an indirect path for peer networking through job satisfaction for men (Fig. 2). This model also produces a good fit with the data [χ² (326) = 595.92 (p = 0.000), CFI = 0.939, IFI = 0.940 and RMSEA = 0.0917], and is a modest improvement in fit over the base model based on parsimony (PNFI = 0.752 versus PNFI = 0.747 for the base model). The significant coefficients in this final model are essentially the same as they are in the base two-group model.

5. Discussion and limitations

This study makes a number of contributions to the emerging literature on the value of networking behavior in sales and the literature on salesperson satisfaction and commitment. First, the results support the contention that networking behavior is related to salesperson job satisfaction and organizational commitment. That is, “individuals’ attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career,” (Forret & Dougherty, 2001, p. 283) is a key element for sales-based job attitudes and outcomes.

Second, scholars have called for research on the value of networking in sales (Flaherty et al., 2012; Seesers et al., 2007), and for greater understanding of networking behaviors, a critical sales force skill (Bradford & Weitz, 2012, p. 424). The study responds to these calls with findings pertinent to theory and practice. The results support the arguments that networking behavior is related to salesperson job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Further, the results suggest that male and female salespeople benefit differently from networking behavior.

Some debate exists in the literature on whether sales managers need to manage male and female salespeople differently. For example, Moncrief et al. (2000) argue and provide evidence that outcome differences (job satisfaction, turnover intention) between male and female salespeople may be less of a concern than it has been in the past because of increasing numbers (hence more balance) of women working in sales. However, other recent research on stress finds important differences for men and women (Karatepe, Yavas, Babakus, & Avci, 2006; Mulki, Jaramillo, Malhotra, & Locander, 2012). The research reported here supports the contention that while global measures of attitudes and outcomes may not be different for men and women, the factors that contribute to these outcomes are different. In fact, in this study the means for job satisfaction and organizational commitment were not statistically different for men and women (satisfaction = 6.06...
men vs. 6.25 women, organizational commitment = 5.84 for both men and women). However, the factors that were related to job satisfaction and commitment did differ for men and women.

Female salespeople benefited more in terms of job satisfaction from efforts at networking professionally, while male job satisfaction links to peer-to-peer networking. Combined, these results suggest that females benefit more from externally-based forms of networking behaviors than men do. In contrast, male salespeople in our study benefited more in terms of job satisfaction from networking with peers. The initial finding that peer networking was not related to job satisfaction for women was somewhat surprising considering literature that suggests that women are more relational/communal at work, while men are more instrumental/agentic (e.g., Babin & Boles, 1998; McNeilly & Goldsmith, 1991). However, the direct link, in the final model, between peer networking and organizational commitment for women may be more consistent with this literature. Considering that men and women may benefit differently from relationships at work, one explanation is that men benefit more instrumentally (relationships with peers help them do their jobs better leading to more positive attitudes about the job) (Van Emmerik et al., 2006). Women, may benefit relationally as peers make the organization a more enjoyable, communal place to work but do not necessarily impact how they feel about their jobs.

Further, the results of the initial two-group analysis indicated that customer networking relates to job satisfaction for women but not for men. This is consistent with the Boles et al. (2007) study that found a significant correlation between satisfaction with customers and satisfaction with job for female salespeople ($r = 0.36, p < .05$), but a non-significant correlation for men ($r = 0.08, \text{n.s.}$). Although this difference did not stand up in the subsequent chi-square difference test, it is an interesting pattern that merits additional investigation. Further, Boles et al. (2007) found that satisfaction with co-workers was more strongly related to organizational commitment for women than for men. Based on this finding, Boles et al. (2007, p. 317) speculated that “It is possible that by providing a supportive network of co-workers that female job satisfaction is enhanced and that, all things being equal, those salespeople may, in the long-term be more committed to the organization.” The finding that peer networking is directly related to organizational commitment for women suggests that peer networks can increase organizational commitment for women, independent of increased job satisfaction. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Boles et al., 2007), there is, at least, partial support for the contention that job satisfaction has a greater impact on organizational commitment for men, than for women. Therefore, although the level of organizational commitment was exactly the same for men and women, the contributing factors and the strength of relationships were not. The findings provide clear evidence that networking behaviors impact work attitudes and outcomes differently for men and women.

The findings also offer implications for managerial thought and practice. Traditionally, the primary focus of networking in sales has been on its potential to generate sales leads and increase sales performance. This research suggests additional benefits that may have been less obvious to sales managers and salespeople. Sales managers have an opportunity to enhance salesperson job satisfaction by encouraging and facilitating networking behaviors both inside and outside of the sales organization. Company efforts to encourage and reward females’ efforts to connect outside the organization may enhance job satisfaction. Further, fostering greater peer interaction holds potential for increasing males’ job satisfaction. Female salespeople also benefit from peer networking, although differently than men, as networking with peers directly impacts organizational commitment. The finding that women profit less from peer networking in terms of job satisfaction is consistent with Van Emmerik et al. (2006), who suggest that organizations might benefit from developing the networking competencies of women to cultivate the kinds of resources that men seek even if they are different than those associated with traditional roles. A clearer understanding of gender differences gives sales managers better opportunity to encourage and support activities that are likely to contribute to greater job satisfaction and commitment.

In any case, opportunities for peer networking remain a challenge for many sales organizations based on the inherent independent and autonomous nature of sales jobs. Salespeople, on their own initiative, have an opportunity to enhance their own job satisfaction by being more proactive in developing internal and external relationships. In sum, understanding the impact of social influences on job satisfaction, and plausibly retention, is important for managers. Going forward, sales managers will face a dynamic that will make retention increasingly critical. Already faced with an environment where the ability to locate and onboard individuals with key sales skills is increasingly challenging (Davidson, 2013), the competition for sales talent will continue to increase, as a greater proportion of the baby boomer generation moves toward retirement. Thus, understanding how personal interactions affect job-based attitudes and retention becomes more important.
In terms of future research, scholars should examine the linkage between networking behavior and job satisfaction in other sales contexts. This is important because sales jobs vary by context and the nature of networks and networking opportunities can also vary. Although our research suggests that networking behavior contributes to job satisfaction, the specific mechanisms and benefits contributing to job satisfaction are less clear. For example, does greater job satisfaction result from receiving benefits (and if so what type of benefits), providing benefits to others, or both. Although the results suggest differences in the relationship between networking behavior and job satisfaction for women and men, it does offer specific empirical evidence of the reasons why these differences exist. Some research (Van Emmerik et al., 2006, p. 26) suggests that men may specialize in the creation of more instrumental, hard, social capital and that women may specialize in the creation of more socio-emotional oriented, soft, social capital. Further research to examine these potential differences in a sales context would be beneficial. Finally, longitudinal research should examine if the relationship between networking behavior and job satisfaction varies at different stages of the sales career life cycle.

Like all studies, this research has limitations. First, all of the respondents are from a specific selling context. Therefore, caution is advised in generalizing the results to all types of sales jobs. In addition, this study was cross-sectional, so no claim is made to causality. A longitudinal approach to study networking behavior would overcome this limitation.

6. Conclusion

The present study addresses recent calls for additional research on the nature and value of networking in sales by examining linkages between networking behaviors, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The findings demonstrate that networking behavior is linked to job satisfaction and commitment, although the benefits of different types of networking may differ for men and women. Female salespeople benefited more from external networking, while male salespeople benefited more internal networking. Hopefully, this research will stimulate additional study of networking and social influences in sales.

Appendix B. Measures

Job satisfaction (from Rutherford et al., 2009)

My job:
1. Does give me a sense of accomplishment
2. Is exciting
3. Is satisfying
4. Is worthwhile

Organizational commitment (Rutherford et al., 2009)

In my job I:
Find that my values and the organization’s values are similar
Feel this organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance

Feel, for me, this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work

For the networking behavior scales, items are drawn or adapted items from other published scales to fit the sales context. (Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Michael & Yukl, 1993; Wolff & Moser, 2006)

Peer networking

How frequently do you:
1. Talk to fellow sales reps who work for your company about your career
2. Talk to fellow salespeople about work issues
3. Keep in contact with your sales colleagues about business matters
4. Give or receive sales advice to (from) other sales reps.

Professional networking

How frequently do you:
1. Make presentations at seminars or workshops that may aid you at work
2. Attend conferences to develop professional or industry contacts
3. Attend seminars or training with others in my profession in order to build my network
4. Take part in trade association meetings that are pertinent to my industry

Customer networking

How frequently do you:
1. Meet with clients and customers to discover how to satisfy their needs
2. Call or visit with clients who can provide good information
3. Ask current clients for referrals
4. Keep in touch with clients regarding their needs
5. Contact clients about current issues

Appendix A. Descriptive statistics

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<th>2</th>
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*p < .01.

References


