

Increased Engagement or Reduced Exhaustion: Which Accounts for the Effect of Job Resources
on Salesperson Job Outcomes?

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Given the stressful nature of sales jobs, research has historically emphasized the importance of reducing exhaustion for promoting desired salesperson job outcomes. Building on data provided by 235 B2B salespeople, this study finds that while reducing exhaustion is important, enhancing engagement may be more critical. Specifically, the results reveal that engagement mediates the effects of customer orientation, training, and supervisor support on sales performance, but exhaustion does not. Furthermore, the results indicate that exhaustion and engagement both mediate the effects of supervisor support on turnover intentions. Implications of the study's findings for theory and practice are discussed.

Sales scholars have long recognized that job resources – i.e., the physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the job that stimulate personal development and facilitate job demand fulfillment (Bakker et al. 2007; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004) – are critical determinants of salesperson job outcomes. For instance, a recent meta-analysis (Zablah et al. 2012) demonstrates that customer orientation, construed as a job resource that rests within the individual (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004), is an important driver of performance and turnover intentions among sales (and service) employees. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Verbeke, Dietz and Verwaal (2011) concludes that selling-related knowledge (a job resource partly resulting from organizational training) is perhaps the most critical predictor of sales performance.

In a majority of extant research to date, job resources are posited to improve salesperson job outcomes by reducing their level of exhaustion, a job state “characterized by a lack of energy and a feeling that one’s emotional resources are used up” (Cordes and Dougherty 1993, p. 623). To illustrate, in a summary of empirical sales research on burnout, Hollet-Haudebert, Mulki and Fournier (2011) identify numerous resources that have been linked to reduced exhaustion (and by extension improved salesperson job outcomes), including but not limited to: supervisor support (Lewin and Sager 2007; Sand and Miyazaki 2000), social support (Lee and Ashford 1996), coping resources (Lewin and Sager 2009; Singh 2000), self-efficacy (Sager, Strutton and Johnson 2006), feedback (Klein and Verbeke 1999), and job autonomy (Grandey, Fisk and Steiner 2005).

The central role ascribed to exhaustion in sales research is consistent with the recognition that boundary-spanning jobs are stressful, and that reducing the exhaustion resulting from such stress is critical to enhancing salesperson job outcomes (Cordes and Dougherty 1993; Singh, Goolsby and Rhoads 1994) . While job resources are instrumental in helping to reduce

salesperson stress and exhaustion, new research grounded in positive psychology (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004) suggests that resources are likely to enhance salesperson job outcomes not only because they reduce exhaustion but also because they enhance engagement.

The burgeoning literature on engagement has thus far defined and operationalized the construct in two different but related ways. Specifically, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) construe engagement as a relatively broad phenomenon, one that captures a (p. 295) “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption,” and measure it using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Others, including Rich, Lepine, and Crawford (2010, p. 617), construe the construct more narrowly, define it as “the investment of an individual’s complete self into a role,” and operationalize it by measuring the level of energy individuals invest in their role performance (Kahn 1992; Rich, LePine and Crawford 2010) for further details on this view of engagement). In this study, we consider both views to be highly compatible but adopt the latter view on engagement – partly because of concerns raised about the commingling of engagement and its antecedents in the UWES – and define the phenomenon as a job state characterized by a salesperson’s full emotional investment in his or her job role (Rich et al. 2010).

Research to date has devoted little attention to exploring the relationship between salesperson-specific job resources and engagement (see Karatepe and Aga 2012 for a notable exception), and towards understanding the joint impact of exhaustion and engagement on salesperson job outcomes. Within the sales domain, we are aware of only two empirical studies that simultaneously consider engagement and exhaustion variables (Miao and Evans 2012; Zablah et al. 2012), and both of those studies use proxies (e.g., adaptive selling behavior and job satisfaction) to operationalize engagement. As a result, it is unclear whether increased

engagement, reduced exhaustion, or both account for the desirable effects of job resources on salesperson job outcomes. This is unfortunate because engagement and exhaustion have been shown to have differential effects on employee job outcomes in other contexts (e.g., Schaufeli and Bakker 2004) and, therefore, insight regarding the relative impact of efforts directed towards enhancing engagement versus curtailing exhaustion on varied salesperson job outcomes (e.g., improved performance or decreased turnover) is likely to be highly useful to sales managers.

It is worth underscoring that while some studies have explored the dual role of exhaustion and engagement within other professions, typically the helping professions (e.g., health care, teaching, and social services), such findings are not generalizable to sales because the tasks, stressors, and resources associated with professional selling differ substantially from those of the helping professions (Lewin and Sager 2007; Rutherford, Shepherd and Tashchian 2015). Said differently, the relative importance of reducing exhaustion and enhancing engagement is likely to differ from one occupation to the next, and thus their relationship and relative impact on varied salesperson job outcomes represents an empirical void worthy of examination in the literature.

To begin to address this important knowledge gap, we specify and test an indirect effects structural equation model grounded in transactional theories of stress (Lazarus 1968; Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 1987) that links three critical salesperson job resources (customer orientation, sales training, and supervisor support) to salesperson performance and turnover intentions via both exhaustion and engagement (see in Figure 1). Our findings, based on data provided by 235 business-to-business sales representatives, suggest that to improve sales performance, management should invest (through selection and development) in resources that enhance employee engagement, and that resources aimed at reducing exhaustion have no incremental effect on salesperson performance. In contrast, the results suggest that if managers' goal is to

reduce turnover, supervisor support is most critical because, unlike the other resources considered in the study, it acts through both engagement and exhaustion to reduce turnover intentions.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Our study makes a meaningful contribution to the literature in at least three ways. First, to the best of our knowledge, our study represents one of the first empirical investigations of the joint role of engagement and exhaustion in a sales context. In so doing, we not only affirm the vital importance of considering engagement-related processes when attempting to understand salesperson phenomena, but also offer insight into the relative returns firms can realize through investments aimed at enhancing engagement versus reducing exhaustion. Second, unlike prior research which tends to examine the effects of a single resource in isolation (e.g., Zablah et al. 2012) or to group all resources under a generic umbrella (e.g., Xanthopoulou et al. 2007), we consider the joint effects of individual (customer orientation), social (supervisor support), and organizational (training) resources on salesperson performance. Doing so allows us to offer sales managers the insight necessary for prioritizing resource investments, which is one of many complex issues in sales management (Ingram 2004). Finally, our research contributes to the continued development of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model by exploring the nature of the causal relationship (through reciprocal effects modeling) between engagement and exhaustion. This particular contribution is noteworthy because it enables us to inform ongoing debate about whether engagement and exhaustion are distinct constructs that possess discriminant validity or simply opposite ends of the same continuum (Cole et al. 2011, p. 1550).

The balance of this manuscript is organized as follows. We begin by briefly introducing our study's independent and dependent variables. We then proceed to develop our study's indirect

effect hypotheses which are grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and the Job Demands-Resource's Model. Our methods are presented next, followed by our reporting of the study results. The manuscript concludes with a discussion of the study findings and their implications for managers, as well as with a brief presentation of future research directions suggested by the study's limitations.

JOB OUTCOMES AND JOB RESOURCES DEFINED

Salesperson Job Outcomes

Consistent with prior work in the sales domain, our study focuses on two job outcomes that are of paramount importance to managers: sales performance and turnover intentions (Franke and Park 2006; Zablah et al. 2012). We define *sales performance* as a salesperson's level of contribution to the effectiveness of the organization (Treadway et al. 2005). Our second job outcome, *turnover intentions*, is defined as the extent to which a salesperson is determined to leave their current organization (Martin 1979). While not a measure of observed behavior, turnover intentions has been shown to be the best predictor of actual turnover in meta-analytic work (Griffeth, Hom and Gaertner 2000).

Salesperson Job Resources

As noted earlier, salesperson job resources can be psychological, organizational, or social in their origin (Nahrgang, Morgeson and Hofmann 2011). Within each realm, a number of resources can contribute to salesperson job outcomes. For instance, from a psychological perspective, job resourcefulness and customer orientation have both been identified as important individual difference variables among those employed in frontline positions (Licata, Mowen, Harris and Brown 2003; Karatepe and Aga 2012). Similarly, from an organizational standpoint, training, autonomy and technology are common resources managers leverage to promote outcomes of

interest among their frontline sales employees (Salanova, Agut and Peiro 2005). Finally, social support and supervisory support have both received significant attention as social factors that, for related reasons, influence salesperson job outcomes (Hollet-Haudebert et al. 2011). In this study, we focus on one relevant resource from each of the three resource categories to explore whether resources of different origin (i.e., psychological, organizational, or social) vary in terms of their relationship with engagement and exhaustion and, by extension, salesperson job outcomes. Specifically, we consider the effects of the following three resources: customer orientation (an individual resource), sales training (an organizational resource), and supervisor support (a social resource; Karatepe, Yavas and Babakus 2007). *Customer orientation* (CO) refers to the extent to which a salesperson's on-the-job behaviors are motivated by a desire to satisfy customers' needs (Zablah et al. 2012). *Sales training* refers to a salesperson's perceptions of the extent to which the firm helps them develop the fundamental knowledge and abilities needed to accomplish role duties in accordance with the criteria set forth by the firm (Costen and Salazar 2011). Finally, *supervisor support* refers to a salesperson's perception of the extent to which their supervisor shows concern for their needs and feelings, provides feedback, encourages their choices, and facilitates skill development (Deci and Ryan 1987; Oldham and Cummings 1996).

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Exhaustion as Mediator of the Effects of Job Resources on Salesperson Job Outcomes

Lazarus' transactional model of stress, TMS, has shaped much of current thinking about the job-related stress processes that produce exhaustion (i.e., a perceived lack of energy and emotional resources; Cordes and Dougherty 1993, p. 623) among workers (Lazarus 1968; Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 1987). A critical tenet of the TMS is that felt stress results from the interaction between a person and his or her environment such that stress is not objectively experienced, but

rather a subjective phenomenon that depends on individuals' appraisal of conditions (i.e., threats) in the environment. In a sales context, for example, this implies that salespeople employed in the same organization, working under identical conditions will differ in the amount of role stress they experience (and hence their eventual levels of exhaustion) because they will vary in their appraisal of the work environment.

According to TMS, stress processes involve two types of appraisals: a primary appraisal and a secondary appraisal. The primary appraisal refers to individuals' judgment about the implications of an encounter with their environment for their own welfare; as a result of this process, the appraiser can reach one of three conclusions: (1) that the encounter is irrelevant to their personal welfare such that it can be ignored, (2) that the encounter is meaningful and beneficial to their welfare, or (3) that the encounter is meaningful and harmful to their welfare (Lazarus 1999). A secondary appraisal process is triggered when the primary appraisal process reveals that the encounter is potentially harmful. The goal of the secondary appraisal process is to determine what, if anything, can be done to create a more positive environment, an environment in which the potential threat to the individual's welfare is neutralized (Folkman and Lazarus 1985).

Over the years, related transactional theories of stress have been leveraged to enhance the robustness and predictions of TMS, especially as it relates to how resources aid in stress reduction and the specific mechanisms (i.e., differential exposure versus differential reactivity) through which those effects occur. In particular, Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory posits that the resources individuals have at their disposal play a pivotal role in determining how they respond to a potential threat in the environment (Hobfoll 1989) and, by extension, in the primary and secondary appraisal processes that ensue following an encounter with the environment.

Further, research that examines the impact of individual difference variables on stress, posits that resources impact stress appraisal processes through what is known as differential exposure and differential reactivity (Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge and Scott 2009). The differential exposure hypothesis suggests that individuals' resource pools influence the way they perceive their job environment, such that those with adequate resources are less likely to perceive the environment as threatening (Bolger and Zuckerman 1995). Stated differently, the differential exposure hypothesis suggests that adequate resource pools are likely to result in a positive primary appraisal following an encounter with the environment. In contrast, the differential reactivity hypothesis suggests that, once a threat is perceived, individuals with adequate resources will experience less strain because they are confident in their ability to neutralize the potential threat (Kammeyer-Mueller et al. 2009). In other words, the differential reactivity hypothesis implies that the secondary appraisal process will be influenced by individuals' resource pools, such that those with adequate resources are likely to conclude that the threat in the environment can be effectively managed.

In line with the above theorizing, we propose that the three job resources selected for investigation in this study – customer orientation, sales training, and supervisor support – lead to reduced salesperson stress by influencing primary and secondary appraisal processes through differential exposure and differential reactivity, respectively. As it relates to the primary appraisal process, we posit that a customer orientation reduces the likelihood that salespeople will appraise customer requests as being threatening because they are intrinsically motivated to help customers fulfill their goals (Zablah et al. 2012). Similarly, we anticipate that training reduces primary appraisals of threat because salespeople endowed with the skills necessary to fulfill their role obligations are less likely to be overwhelmed by the ever-changing demands of

their sales roles (Artis and Harris 2007). Finally, we expect that primary appraisals of threat will be less likely when supervisors are supportive because salespeople are more likely to have access to key resources necessary for meeting the challenges of their job (Babin and Boles 1996).

Beyond minimizing perceived threats in the environment, each of the three job resources is also expected to minimize felt stress by enhancing salesperson's level of confidence in their ability to neutralize the threat in their environment. Thus, as it relates to the secondary appraisal process, we anticipate that customer oriented salespeople will experience less stress in the face of customer stressors because they will feel confident in their ability to "diffuse" threatening customer situations given their natural inclination to closely engage and work with customers (Zablah et al. 2012). Likewise, because training endows salespeople with the skills necessary to fulfill their job roles, we expect that those who have received training will experience less stress when dealing with unusual challenges they encounter in their job role (Artis and Harris 2007). Finally, we posit that salespeople who have supportive supervisor will experience less stress in the face of the threat, because they are confident that their supervisor will support their efforts to manage potential challenges in creative ways (Babin and Boles 1996).

In summary, we anticipate that by shaping primary and secondary appraisal processes, customer orientation, sales training, and supervisor support will lead to a reduction in the level of stress a salesperson experiences, and – by extension – in their level of job exhaustion (Maslach and Leiter 2008). This reduced level of exhaustion is expected to have beneficial implications for salesperson job outcomes, including their performance and turnover intentions. We predict this occurs because, when exhausted, individuals withhold effort in an attempt to conserve their resources (Hobfoll 1989), which ultimately becomes manifest in their job performance and

intentions to remain at their job (Wright and Hobfoll 2004). Consistent with the preceding exposition, we advance the following indirect effect hypotheses:

H1a: Customer orientation has a beneficial indirect effect on salesperson job outcomes (sales performance and turnover intentions) that is partially mediated by job exhaustion.

H2a: Sales training has a beneficial indirect effect on salesperson job outcomes (sales performance and turnover intentions) that is partially mediated by job exhaustion.

H3a: Supervisor support has a beneficial indirect effect on salesperson job outcomes (sales performance and turnover intentions) that is partially mediated by job exhaustion.

Engagement as Mediator of the Effects of Job Resources on Salesperson Job Outcomes

The Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Demerouti et al. 2001) extends transactional theories of stress by arguing that, in addition to reducing exhaustion, job resources also promote worker engagement, a job state characterized by a full emotional investment in one's job role (Rich et al. 2010). That is, they propose that resources act through parallel paths – one focused on exhaustion and the other on engagement – to influence worker job outcomes. While some controversy exists regarding the discriminant validity of engagement and exhaustion constructs (Cole et al. 2011, p. 1550), the dual path conceptualization has received strong support in the literature (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). In addition, we note that although an exhausted employee is unlikely to be engaged, a lack of exhaustion does not imply that an employee will be engaged; this distinction underscores the merits of examining both paths simultaneously.

JD-R theorists suggest that job resources can promote engagement by enabling employees to fulfill their basic needs (i.e., intrinsically motivating) or by helping them achieve their work goals (i.e., extrinsically motivating; Bakker and Demerouti 2007). We anticipate that

all three resources considered in this study will serve as extrinsic motivators of salesperson engagement. Specifically, we expect that customer orientation promotes salesperson engagement by serving as a “potent extrinsic motivator because it focuses their job effort on customer need satisfaction, a critical ingredient for success or superior performance” in sales jobs (Zablah et al. 2012, p. 27). Stated differently, we posit that customer orientation facilitates the achievement of sales goals (and, by extension, commission payments) and thus fuels a salesperson’s level of investment in the job (see Zablah et al. 2012 for a discussion of CO’s potential role as an intrinsic motivator). Similarly, we expect that sales training will promote engagement because it enables salespeople to develop skills and abilities that are relevant to their job role; such training has been shown to increase employee satisfaction (Lee and Bruvold 2003) and productivity (Costen and Salazar 2011) in other contexts, both of which are correlates of employee engagement. Finally, we predict that salespeople with supportive supervisors will be more engaged in their jobs because such support will promote the achievement of job goals, either by facilitating the flow of resources necessary for goal attainment or by providing feedback necessary for continued growth on the job (Deci and Ryan 1987; Oldham and Cummings 1996). This expectation is consistent with empirical work that has linked engagement to the level of support and resources available at work (May, Gilson and Harter 2004).

In summary, we anticipate that by facilitating work goal achievement, customer orientation, sales training, and supervisor support will each contribute to the enhancement of salesperson engagement. Furthermore, we anticipate that heightened levels of engagement will have beneficial implications for salesperson job outcomes, including their performance and turnover intentions. We predict this occurs because salespeople that are engaged focus all of their energies on goal attainment and thus are more effective on the job (Nahrgang et al. 2011). In

addition, engaged salespeople are likely to find their work conditions to be favorable and thus are less likely to express a desire to abandon their employment (Zablah et al. 2012). The following indirect effect hypotheses formally express the expectations set forth in the preceding exposition:

H1b: Customer orientation has a beneficial indirect effect on salesperson job outcomes (sales performance and turnover intentions) that is partially mediated by job engagement.

H2b: Sales training has a beneficial indirect effect on salesperson job outcomes (sales performance and turnover intentions) that is partially mediated by job engagement.

H3b: Supervisor support has a beneficial indirect effect on salesperson job outcomes (sales performance and turnover intentions) that is partially mediated by job engagement.

METHODS

Procedures and Measures

Procedures

We gathered data from a Qualtrics online panel of business-to-business (B2B) salespeople to test the proposed conceptual model. To enhance the generalizability of the study's findings, panelists from a variety of B2B industries were invited to participate in the study. The panel provider employed several measures to exclude outliers and straight line responders from the final sample. In addition, the research team examined the data to identify outliers and/or potential straight line responders not excluded by the panel provider, and decided to exclude three respondents from the sample based on their analysis. These procedures resulted in a sample size of 235 B2B salespeople for model estimation purposes. The sample is 57% male. A plurality of respondents (74%) are between the ages of 30 and 59, and over half (52%) report having earned a college degree. Exactly half of the respondents reported that commission as a percentage of their total compensation is less than 20%. Finally, about one third (34%) of respondents indicated that they

had been employed in a sales job for less than 10 years while 36% reported having 10 but less than 20 years of sales experience.

Measures

Multi-item scales adapted from prior research were used to measure all study constructs (see the Appendix for details on the measurement items, including standardized factor loadings). While self-report data is most appropriate for assessing constructs that refer to individuals' perceptions, beliefs, or feelings (Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff 2012), obtaining all measures from a single source raises concerns about common method variance (CMV). Thus, we made an effort to control for CMV by using different scale formats (e.g., 1-7 point scale versus 0-100 point scale) to measure the predictor, mediating and criterion variables, an a priori procedural step that minimizes the risk of common method variance by reducing the commonality in scale endpoints and potential anchoring effects (Podsakoff et al. 2003). All three of the antecedents were measured using 7-point likert-type scales anchored by 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. Specifically, we adapted Grant's (2008) four item prosocial motivation scale – which measures the extent to which satisfying the needs of others motivates employees' on-the-job behaviors – to assess customer orientation. The items were adapted to ask respondents to focus on “customers” rather than “others” when answering the survey questions. Supervisor support was measured using five items taken from the work of Anaza and Rutherford (2012). Finally, sales training was measured with five items adapted from Leach, Liu, and Johnston (2005). Specifically, this scale was adapted to ensure the items focused on training to achieve sales-specific goals (e.g., managing customer relationships) rather than more generic goals (e.g., persisting in goal pursuit).

The study's two mediators, emotional engagement and emotional exhaustion, were measured using 11 point likert-type scales, anchored by 0=strongly disagree and 10=strongly

agree. In particular, emotional engagement was measured using a five item scale developed by Rich et al. (2010). In an effort to curtail the overall length of the questionnaire, the item “I am proud of my job” was not measured, as it showed the lowest factor loadings in the work of Rich et al. (2010). Emotional exhaustion, in contrast, was assessed using eight items that are part of Maslach and Jackson’s (1981) multidimensional burnout inventory.

Finally, the two dependent variables, job performance and turnover intentions, were each measured on a 0 -100 point scale. Four items from Sujan, Weitz, and Kumar (1994) were adapted to measure job performance in the present study. The items included in the study focused on sales performance only, and were adapted and/or selected to ensure that they were relevant to a wide cross-section of salespeople (as included in our sample); thus, we excluded items, for example, that reference performance related to the sales of high profit margin products or selling to major accounts. Turnover intentions was measured using the five item scale recently employed by Rutherford et al. (2011) in a sales context. A summary of all construct descriptive statistics and inter-construct correlations is provided in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In order to evaluate the scales’ properties, measurement items were subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis in *Mplus* 7.1. In order to preserve an adequate parameter to observation ratio, we estimated two separate CFAs: one for the independent variables (customer orientation, sales training, and supervisor support), and the other for the mediators (engagement and exhaustion) and dependent variables (sales performance and turnover intentions). The fit indices for both CFAs suggest that the measurement models provides a good fit to the data (Hu and Bentler 1999;

CFA 1: $\chi^2 = 148.1$, 62 d.f., $p < .01$; CFI = .97, SRMR = .04; RMSEA = .08; CFA 2: $\chi^2 = 472.7$, 203 d.f., $p < .01$; CFI = .95, SRMR = .05; RMSEA = .08)¹. The measurement models' good fit and a residuals analysis support the fundamental assumption of unidimensional measurement (Anderson and Gerbing 1988).

Importantly, as is summarized in Table 1, additional evidence provided by or derived from the CFAs suggests that the resulting measures are reliable and valid. More specifically, the relatively high composite reliabilities (all 0.86 or greater) and average variances extracted (all 60.3% or greater) provide evidence in support of the measures' reliability (Fornell and Larcker 1981; Gerbing and Anderson 1988). Furthermore, indication of the measures' convergent validity is provided by the fact that all factor loadings are significant and that the scales exhibit high levels of internal consistency (Anderson and Gerbing 1988; Fornell and Larcker 1981). Evidence of the measures' discriminant validity is provided by the finding that the average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the constructs is substantially greater than its error-corrected shared variance with any of the other constructs in the model (see Table 1 for details).

Test of the Proposed Model

The proposed dual process model (see Figure 1) was estimated using structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques as implemented in *Mplus 7.1*. To achieve an adequate parameter-to-observation ratio while still accounting for the impact of measurement error on our path estimates, we (1) tested the model using a single scale score for each of the study constructs, and (2) fixed the measurement error term for each construct at $(1 - \alpha)$ times the variance of the scale score (e.g., MacKenzie, Podsakoff and Ahearne 1998; Siguaaw, Simpson and Baker 1998).

¹ CFA 2 revealed that items four and eight of the of the Maslach and Jackson (1981) emotional exhaustion scale have more variance in common with each other than allowed for by the model (i.e., the items are redundant; see Rigdon 1998). Therefore, only one of the two items (number four) was retained for analysis purposes.

Overall, the results suggest that the proposed model provides a good fit to the data (Hu and Bentler 1999; $\chi^2=12.3$, 6 d.f., $p > .05$; CFI = .99, SRMR = .02, RMSEA = .07). In addition, the model explains a significant proportion of the variance in the model's endogenous constructs (engagement = 47%; exhaustion = 22%; job performance = 19%; turnover intentions = 59%).

The structural path estimates and their associated significance values are reported in Figure 2. As the Figure suggests, customer orientation was found to be a significant predictor of engagement ($\beta = .22, p < .01$), but not of exhaustion ($\beta = -.05, p > .10$). The same was found to be true for sales training as it predicted engagement ($\beta = .24, p < .01$) but not exhaustion ($\beta = -.04, p > .10$). Supervisor support, in contrast, was found to be a strong predictor of both engagement ($\beta = .44, p < .01$) and exhaustion ($\beta = -.43, p < .01$). In turn, engagement ($\beta = -.34, p < .01$) and exhaustion ($\beta = .51, p < .01$) were both found to be significant predictors of salesperson turnover intentions. However, while engagement ($\beta = .44, p < .01$) was found to be a significant predictor of sales performance, exhaustion was not ($\beta = -.01, p > .10$).

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Test of the Indirect Effect Hypotheses

The study hypotheses posit that job resources impact salesperson job outcomes indirectly via job engagement and job exhaustion. Following recent recommendations in the literature (e.g., Preacher and Hayes 2008), we tested the proposed indirect effects using bootstrapped SEM (5,000 draws) in *Mplus* 7.1. As is summarized in Table 2, the results provide support for seven of the twelve proposed indirect effects. Specifically, contrary to H1a, exhaustion was not found to mediate the effects of customer orientation on salesperson job performance ($ab = .00, p > .10$) or turnover intentions ($ab = -.02, p > .10$). However, consistent with H1b, the results reveal that customer orientation has a positive indirect effect on salesperson job performance via

engagement ($ab = .09, p < .05$) and a negative indirect effect on turnover intentions via engagement ($ab = -.08, p < .01$). Furthermore, contrary to H2a, exhaustion was not found to mediate the effects of sales training on salesperson job performance ($ab = .00, p > .10$) or turnover intentions ($ab = -.02, p > .10$). Consistent with H2b, however, the results indicate that sales training has positive indirect effect on salesperson job performance via engagement ($ab = .10, p < .05$) and a negative indirect effect on turnover intentions via engagement ($ab = -.08, p < .01$). The results offer mixed support for H3a as they reveal that supervisor support does not have an indirect effect on salesperson job performance via exhaustion ($ab = .01, p > .10$) but does, indeed, have a negative indirect effect on turnover intentions via exhaustion ($ab = -.22, p < .01$). Finally, as predicted in H3b, the results reveal that supervisor support has a positive indirect effect on salesperson job performance via engagement ($ab = .19, p < .01$) and a negative indirect effect on turnover intentions via engagement ($ab = -.15, p < .01$).

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Post-Hoc Analyses

We performed a series of post-hoc analyses to extend or verify our study's findings. First, to assess the type of mediation present, we specified and tested an additional SEM model in which direct effects were modeled from the study's three independent variables to the two dependent variables. The results of this analysis did not reveal any significant ($p > .05$) unmediated, direct effects of the independent variables on the dependent constructs (inclusion of the direct effects, either in isolation or together, did not result in a significant improvement in model fit as indicated by a reduction in χ^2 values). These findings are consistent with the conclusion that engagement and exhaustion fully mediate the effects of the job resources (i.e., customer

orientation, sales training, and supervisor support) on the job outcomes (sales performance and turnover intentions; Iacobucci, Saldanha and Deng 2007).

Since the constructs in the model are measured using self-reported scales gathered at a single point in time, common method variance (CMV) is possible (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In order to control for CMV, common scale properties were curtailed, different scale formats were applied to the various construct, and a statistical assessment of the potential impact of CMV on our study results was performed (Podsakoff et al. 2012). Specifically, the procedures outlined by Lindell and Whitney (2001) were utilized to assess the potential impact of CMV on our study results. The results of this procedure – which involves using marker variables to partial out the effects of CMV on correlations of interest – revealed that controlling for CMV does not alter the sign or significance of construct correlations. This finding supports the conclusion that CMV is unlikely to have a meaningful impact on the reported findings (e.g., Brady, Voorhees and Brusco 2012).

Finally, consistent with prior research (e.g., Schaufeli and Bakker 2004), we did not specify a causal relationship between emotional engagement and emotional exhaustion; rather, we simply allowed the two constructs to covary. To the extent that a causal relationship exists between both constructs, our conclusions regarding the indirect effects identified in this study might change. Therefore, to assess the adequacy of our modeling decision, we followed the procedures outlined by Rigdon (1995) to estimate a model that includes reciprocal paths between emotional engagement and emotional exhaustion. The results of this analysis, which are graphically illustrated in Figure 3, indicate that emotional engagement and emotional exhaustion are not significantly ($p > .10$) related to one another once their common antecedents are accounted for. This finding thus supports our approach to modeling the relationship within our study and

generally affirms untested theoretical arguments advanced in prior research that the two constructs operate in parallel to influence employee outcomes.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

DISCUSSION

This study finds support for the majority of the proposed hypotheses based on data provided by 235 B2B salespeople and thus offers insight into the mechanisms through which three job resources (customer orientation, sales training, and supervisor support) influence salesperson job outcomes (including sales performance and turnover intentions). The results confirm that engagement and exhaustion represent independent, parallel processes that link job resources to job outcomes. More importantly, they also reveal that increased job engagement – as opposed to reduced job exhaustion – accounts for a majority of the effect of these resources on salesperson job outcomes. Finally, the results indicate that, out of the three resources considered in this study, supervisor support has the largest impact on salesperson turnover intentions because, unlike the other two resources, it acts through both engagement and exhaustion to influence a salesperson's desire to exit the organization.

Implications for Theory

Models of salesperson performance and turnover should account for the effects of engagement. Job stress has been shown to have detrimental effects on employee and organizational welfare because it exhausts employees, and ultimately leads to diminished performance and turnover (Hollet-Haudebert et al. 2011). Given that job stress is particularly severe in the sales profession (Mulki et al. 2012), scholars have devoted extensive attention towards understanding how critical resources (e.g., supervisor support) help reduce exhaustion among boundary-spanning employees in sales roles. While the impact of stress and exhaustion

on salesperson job outcomes is undeniable, research grounded in the Job Demands-Resources Model (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004) suggests that a focus on exhaustion is insufficient for understanding employee work outcomes; they argue, rather, that both exhaustion and engagement must be considered as parallel processes that influence work outcomes. Our study, which represents one of the first investigations of the joint role of engagement and exhaustion in a sales context, largely affirms the impact of salesperson engagement on their job outcomes. In particular, our results reveal that customer orientation, sales training, and supervisor support influence salesperson performance only through their effects on engagement (none of the indirect effects through exhaustion were found to be significant). In addition, the results reveal that each of the three resources indirectly influence turnover intentions via their effects on engagement, while only supervisor support has a similar effect via exhaustion. These results are consistent with Job Demands-Resources theorists' proposition that the availability of resources stimulates engagement while the presence of job demands produces exhaustion (Demerouti et al. 2001). These findings thus imply that when research interest revolves around exploring the impact of resources (e.g., empowerment) on salesperson job outcomes, the mediating role of engagement should be considered.

Research should explore the differential effects of job resources on salesperson engagement and exhaustion. Our research differs from prior efforts in that we consider the joint influence of multiple resources on engagement and exhaustion. Based on extant theory, we anticipated finding that each of the resources would have a direct effect on engagement and exhaustion. We, however, did not find this to be the case. Specifically, as is illustrated in Figure 2, we found that all three resources have a direct effect on engagement while only supervisor support impacts exhaustion. We note, however, that each of the job resources exhibits a

significant ($p < .05$) bivariate correlation with exhaustion. This pattern of effects seems to suggest that the effect of resources on exhaustion may be contingent on the presence of other resources such that certain resources only help reduce exhaustion in the absence of more “relevant” resources (in the case of our study, supervisor support seems to be the more “relevant” resource). The same does not appear to be true for engagement; that is, despite a similar pattern of zero-order correlations, all three resources proved to be significant predictors of engagement in the multivariate model. Taken together, these findings imply that to produce engagement more resources (within reason) are better while, in the case of exhaustion, the presence of a critical resource may be most important (and thus identifying those critical resources should be a priority).

Engagement and exhaustion should be modeled as parallel processes. In a recent meta-analysis, Cole et al. (2011, p. 1550) challenge the assertion that engagement and exhaustion are “independent and useful constructs” based on the fact that the two constructs exhibit a similar pattern of association with other correlates and are also highly correlated themselves. The findings of our study counter this assertion in at least two different ways. First, we find that the two constructs exhibit a different pattern of relationships with the study antecedent and outcome variables. Specifically, engagement is related to all five of the model’s other constructs while exhaustion is only related to two of the model’s constructs. Second, given the data available to us, we were able to explore the nature of the causal relationship between the two constructs through reciprocal effects modeling. As Figure 3 illustrates, the results of this analysis indicate that the two constructs are not related to each other; that is, we find that neither the effect of engagement on exhaustion nor of exhaustion on engagement are significant. This finding

suggests that the two constructs operate independently, and should be modeled as parallel processes as posited by the Job Demands-Resources Model.

Implications for Practice

Managers should promote salesperson engagement through selection and development decisions. The study results suggest that selecting salespeople with certain resources pools (e.g., salespeople who possess a strong degree of customer orientation) and that providing salespeople with critical resources, such as training or support, enhance performance and reduce turnover intentions primarily because they promote engagement. In particular, the results of our indirect effects analysis suggest that to improve sales performance, management should invest in resources that enhance salesperson engagement, and that resources aimed at reducing exhaustion have no incremental effect on salesperson performance (because exhaustion is unrelated to performance). Stated differently, the results of our study imply that managers should not only focus on preventing salesperson exhaustion by, for example, attempting to influence the level of role stress they experience; rather, they should actively promote salesperson engagement through resource investments that facilitate task achievement (e.g., ongoing training) and promote salesperson development. In the case of the latter, this implies that managerial efforts that serve to challenge salespeople – such as outlining task-related goals, specifying target performance metrics, and clearly communicating expectations – have the potential to enhance salespersons' level of connectivity to or engagement with their work assignment and, by extension, their sales performance (Christian, Garza and Slaughter 2011; Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002). In addition, managers should recognize that just because a salesperson is not exhausted (e.g., due to low role stress), it does not mean they are engaged or fully invested in their job roles. Both low

exhaustion and high engagement are necessary for maximizing organizationally valued salesperson job outcomes, and resource availability is critical for maximizing engagement.

Managers should recognize the relative importance of supportive supervision to salesperson job outcomes. This study considered the role of three resources that have long been linked to salesperson performance: customer orientation, training, and supportive supervision. Out of these three resources, supportive supervision seems to be the most critical, especially when managers' goal is to reduce salesperson turnover. Contrary to the other resources considered in the study, supportive supervision was found to impact turnover intentions via both engagement and exhaustion. As a result, supervisor support has a larger total effect on turnover intentions than both training and customer orientation (this conclusion is supported by the indirect effects in Table 2 which reveal that the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval for the total effect of supervisor support on turnover intentions does not overlap with the corresponding confidence interval for the other two job resources). This result has critical implications for sales managers' allocation of their time; while managers can allocate their efforts across numerous tasks (e.g., being in the field, offering guidance to subordinates, monitoring salesperson effort), they should prioritize those activities that provide and signal support to the employees they supervise. Creating an environment in which the salesperson feels a genuine concern for their well-being and growth, where they feel free to present ideas or advance innovative solutions, and where they have the sense of being treated as equals is thus critical to achieving desirable salesperson job outcomes (Jaramillo and Mulki 2008). Specifically, doing so has the potential to both enhance sales performance and reduce turnover intentions because, unlike the other resources examined in this study, supervisory support promotes engagement and also helps buffer against exhaustion.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings and limitations of our study suggest several avenues for future research that we discuss next. First, our study was carried out among B2B salespeople only. While doing so ensured that model constructs were relevant for all study participants, it is possible that the findings do not extend to salespeople employed in retail or B2C contexts. For instance, it is possible that available resources, such as customer orientation, have a bigger impact on salesperson exhaustion in retail contexts because of the larger customer workloads that salespeople face in such environments (Zablah et al. 2012). Second, our study focused only on salesperson emotional engagement; as Rich et al. (2010) note, engagement can also be physical and cognitive. While these authors suggest that the three engagement dimensions are highly related (as indicated by very strong loadings on a second order factor model), it is possible that the study results may have differed if other dimensions were considered in the study. Future research should explore this possibility. Third, given that our intent with this study was to offer insight into the parallel, mediating roles of engagement and exhaustion, we did not evaluate the role of potential moderators in our study. As suggested by the Job Demands-Resources Model, it is possible that the impact of the three resources considered in this study on engagement and exhaustion are dependent on the types of demands (e.g., hours worked) salespeople face in their particular jobs. Future research should expand on our current inquiry to determine whether the indirect effects isolated in this study vary as a function of the specific challenges or demands salespeople face. Fourth, we posit that job resources help reduce emotional exhaustion by providing for differential exposure and differential reactivity to potential stressors (Kammeyer-Mueller et al. 2009). However, as in most other studies, we do not directly gauge whether differential exposure or differential reactivity truly account for the observed findings; future research should explore this possibility directly. Finally, our study investigates the effects of

three resources simultaneously. While doing so is a departure from prior engagement research which has focused on a single resource or an amalgamation of multiple resources, future research should consider the effects of other resources that may be highly relevant in a sales context, such as empowerment, self-efficacy, and persistence.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on data provided by 235 B2B salespeople, this study explores the extent to which enhanced engagement and reduced exhaustion help explain the impact of job resources on salesperson job outcomes. Consistent with the Job Demands-Resources Model, we find that resources enhance salesperson job outcomes primarily through their effects on job engagement. While the findings do not diminish the importance of understanding how exhaustion-related processes impact salesperson job outcomes, they do underscore that accounting for often-ignored, engagement-related processes is critical to an adequate understanding of salesperson phenomena.

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Table 1
Construct Properties

	Mean	SD	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>1. Customer Orientation</i>	6.3	0.7	74.8	0.92	0.08	0.03	0.21	0.14	0.06	0.02
<i>2. Supervisor Support</i>	5.5	1.4	80.2	0.28	0.95	0.24	0.21	0.38	0.04	0.25
<i>3. Sales Training</i>	4.9	1.4	60.3	0.17	0.49	0.86	0.07	0.24	0.07	0.07
<i>4. Emotional Exhaustion</i>	3.7	2.5	68.5	-0.46	-0.46	-0.26	0.95	0.34	0.07	0.50
<i>5. Emotional Engagement</i>	7.6	2.1	84.6	0.38	0.62	0.49	-0.58	0.96	0.18	0.41
<i>6. Job Performance</i>	79.7	14.8	81.1	0.25	0.20	0.26	-0.26	0.43	0.94	0.05
<i>7. Turnover Intentions</i>	25.9	28.1	76.0	-0.14	-0.50	-0.26	0.71	-0.64	-0.22	0.94

Notes: S.D. = standard deviation. AVE = average variance extracted. Entries below the diagonal of the correlation matrix are construct correlations. Entries above the diagonal of the correlation matrix represent shared variance between the constructs. Composite reliabilities are shown in bold on the correlation matrix diagonal. Correlations greater than |.13| are significant ($p < .05$).

Table 2
Standardized Indirect Effects of Job Resources on Salesperson Job Outcomes

Indirect Effect of	95 % Bootstrapped Confidence Interval for Focal Indirect Effect					
	Via Engagement		Via Exhaustion		Via Both Mediators Combined	
	<u>Lower-B</u>	<u>Upper-B</u>	<u>Lower-B</u>	<u>Upper-B</u>	<u>Lower-B</u>	<u>Upper-B</u>
Customer Orientation on Performance	.016	.171*	-.012	.013	.018	.169*
Training on Performance	.021	.186*	-.015	.016	.023	.185*
Supervisor Support on Performance	.099	.273*	-.065	.075	.107	.275*
Customer Orientation on Turnover Intentions	-.132	-.019*	-.090	.044	-.194	-.003*
Training on Turnover Intentions	-.139	-.028*	-.104	.059	-.224	.011
Supervisor Support on Turnover Intentions	-.254	-.046*	-.317	-.124*	-.478	-.264*

Notes: Lower-B = lower-bound of 95% confidence interval. Upper-B = upper-bound of 95% confidence interval.

* Indicates that the 95% confidence interval does not include zero within its range.

Figure 1
Conceptual Model

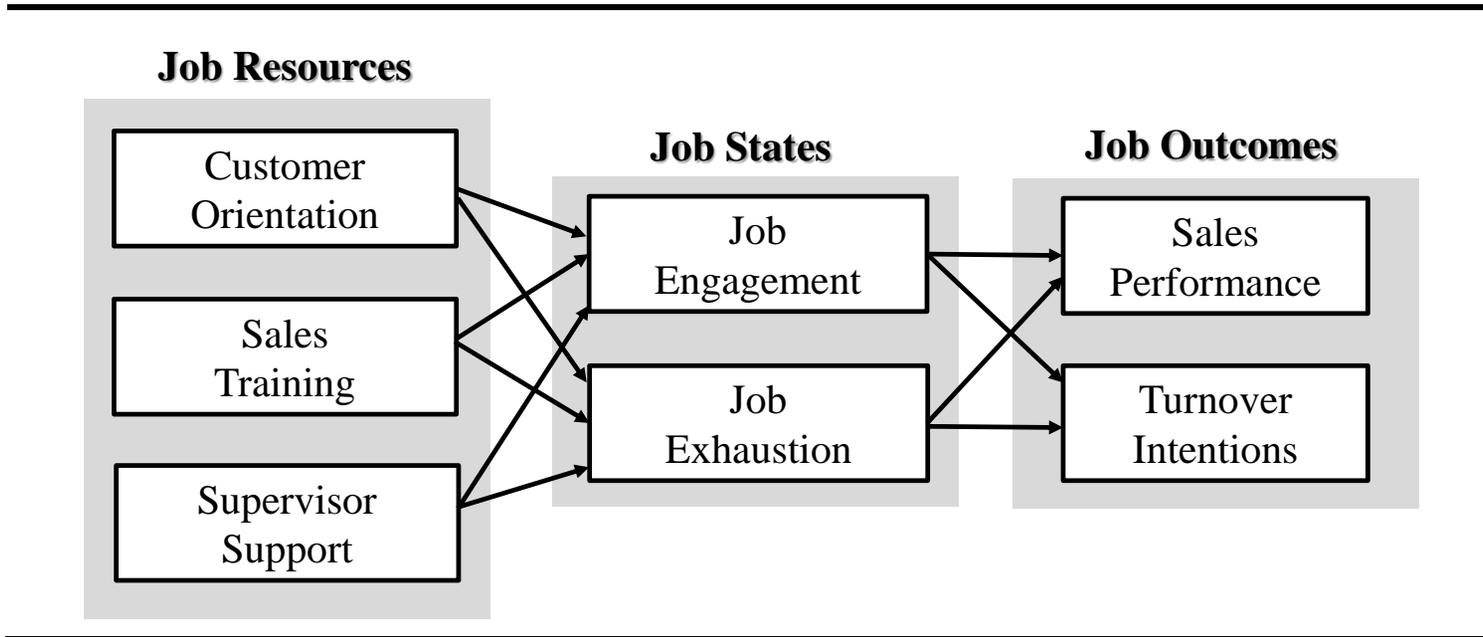
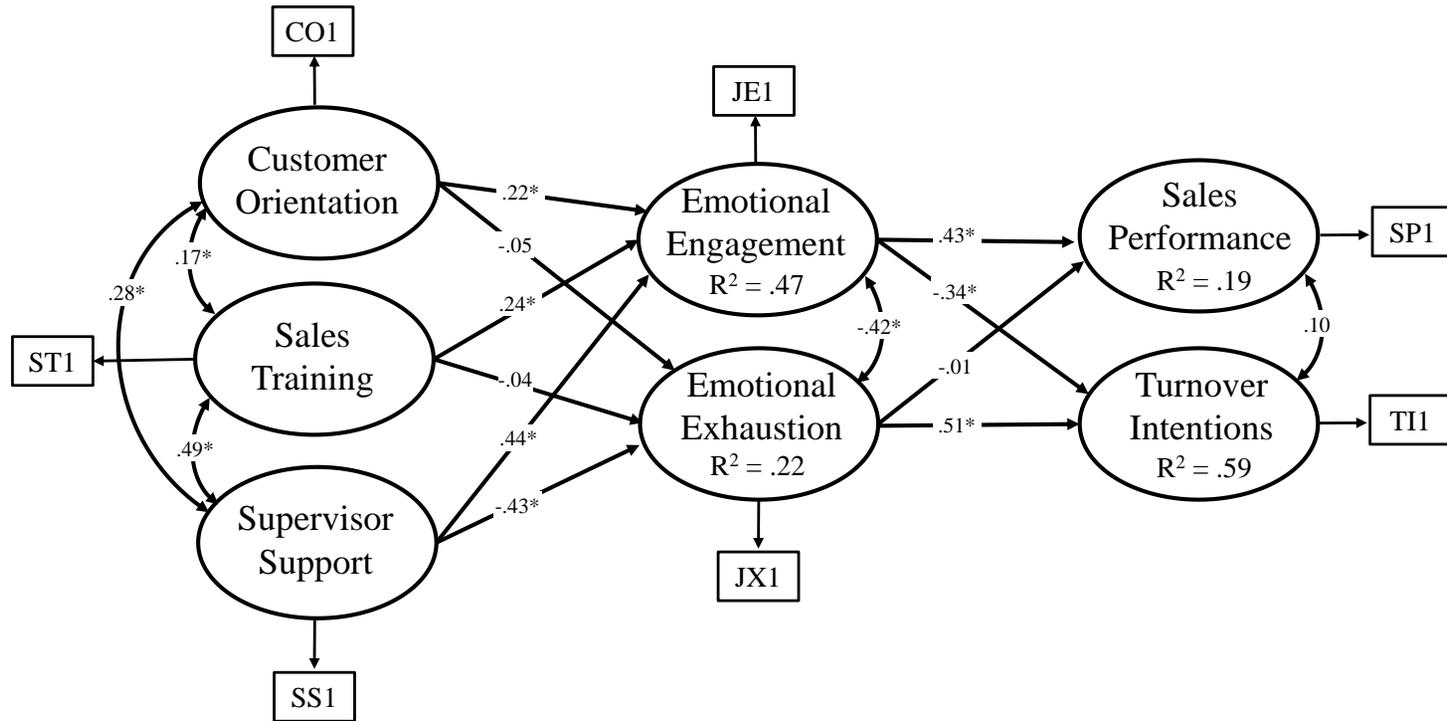


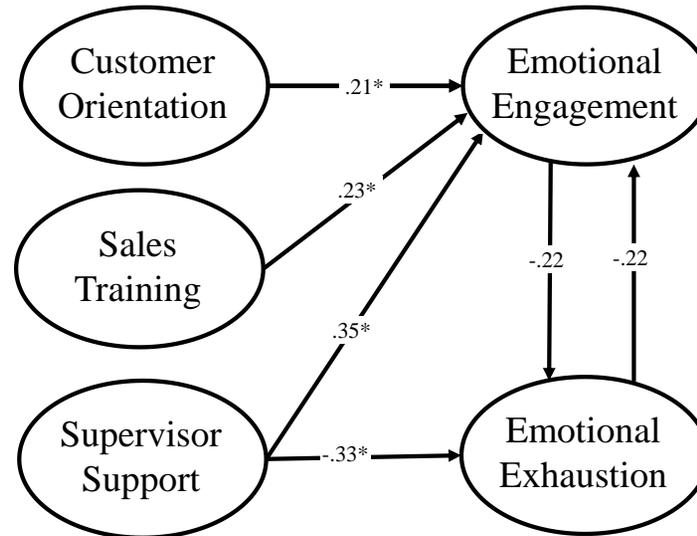
Figure 2
Empirical Test of the Proposed Conceptual Model



Notes: Model fit: $\chi^2_{(6 \text{ d.f.})} = 12.3, p > .05$; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .02. The effects of all three antecedents are fully-mediated by job engagement and job exhaustion.

* $p < .01$.

Figure 3
Empirical Test of the Engagement-Exhaustion Relationship



Notes: Model fit: $\chi^2_{(6 \text{ d.f.})} = 12.3, p > .05$; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .02.
After accounting for their common antecedents, job engagement and job exhaustion are not causally related.

* $p < .05$.

Appendix

Scale	Loadings	Scale	Loadings
Turnover Intentions, SD=0, SA=100, Rutherford, Park, et al. (2011)		Emotional Engagement, SD=0, SA=10, Rich et. al. (2010)	
<i>Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.</i>		<i>Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:</i>	
-I often think about quitting my present job	.86	-I am enthusiastic in my job.	.94
-I intend to quit my job in the next 12 months.	.83	-I feel energetic at my job.	.91
-During the next 12 months I intend to search for another job.	.93	-I am excited about my job.	.95
-I am constantly searching for a new job.	.82	-I feel positive about my job.	.92
-I often think about finding an alternative line of work (an activity other than my present line of work).	.91	-I am interested in my job.	.88
Supervisor Support, SD=1, SA=7, Anaza & Rutherford (2012)		Customer Orientation, SD=1, SA=7, Grant (2008)	
<i>Do you agree or disagree that each of the following statements accurately describes how you perceive your immediate supervisor.</i>		<i>Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. I am motivated to do the work I do because ...</i>	
-My supervisor cares about my well-being.	.90	...I care about benefiting customers through my work	.85
-My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values.	.88	...I want to help customers through my work	.92
-My supervisor shows a lot of concern for me.	.94	...I want to have a positive impact on customers	.84
-My supervisor is willing to help me if I need help.	.86	...it is important to me to do good for customers through my work.	.86
-My supervisor cares about my opinions.	.90		
Sales Training, SD=1, SA=7, Leach, Liu, & Johnston (2005)		Emotional Exhaustion, 0=Never, 10=Always, Maslach and Jackson (1981)	
<i>Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. During the time that I have been with my current employer, I have received training that focused on how to effectively...</i>		<i>Indicate how often you experience the following feelings:</i>	
...end relationships with customers.	.70	-Copyrighted item 1	.88
...select customers to pursue.	.86	-Copyrighted item 2	.84
...tailor products and services to meet customer needs.	.74	-Copyrighted item 3	.86
...prioritize customers based on their potential profitability.	.79	-Copyrighted item 4	.75
		-Copyrighted item 5	.89
		-Copyrighted item 6	.83
		-Copyrighted item 7	.71
		-Copyrighted item 9	.85
Performance, Much Worse=0, Much Better=100, Sujan, Weitz, & Kumar (1994)			
<i>Compared to other salespeople at your firm, how does your performance rate along the following dimensions:</i>			
-Level of dollar sales generated.	.89		
-Achievement of sales targets.	.91		
-Overall sales performance.	.93		
-Revenue generated from customers.	.87		