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AMBIDEXTERITY AND SALES:

A CAREER STAGE PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

In recent years, sales research has progressively gained more and more attention in the field of marketing research, as evidenced by the general trends for scholarly activity in selling and sales management (Moncrief *et al.* 2000; Richards *et al.* 2010; Rapp and Beeler 2021). At the same time, the sales practice is facing a dramatic evolution, as the salesperson role is transforming, due to increasingly complex and dynamic B2B contexts (Sharma and Syam 2018; Cardinali 2019; Sleep *et al.* 2020), and sales education is progressively establishing in higher education curricula (Ahearne 2017; Ballestra *et al.* 2017; Spiller *et al.* 2019).

In the past, the marketing literature has considered sales as a tactical activity related to the implementation of marketing strategies, but over the years it has become clear that the role of sales is often more crucial and central than it used to be thought (Terho *et al.* 2015). Moreover, scholars have observed an evident change in the sales practices, which are shifting from an operational focus to a more strategic one (e.g. Cron 2017), in which high value-added offerings and a and value co-creation (Lemmens *et al.* 2014; Töytäri and Rajala, 2015) are emphasized. As the centrality and importance of sales

increase, the selling function is often found under stress from decreased effectiveness and increasing costs (Paesbrugghe *et al.* 2018).

To meet the growing challenges of today's hypercompetitive marketplace, organizations are trying to focus on highly critical and value adding types of sales as consultative selling and solution selling (Rangarajan *et al.* 2018) and gradually adopting and experimenting with new paradigms, to improve the effectiveness of the B2B sales force (Sharma and Sheth, 2010; Cuevas 2018). As changes in the context are challenging existing sales force models, organizations are looking for new ways to optimally manage their resources and achieve multiple goals (Yu *et al.* 2013; Rapp *et al.* 2017; Sleep *et al.* 2020). In recent years, the paradigm of sales ambidexterity has emerged, as and effort to obtain apparently irreconcilable results and objectives, which ultimately lead to increased sales performance (Yu *et al.*, 2013; Vieira *et al.*, 2019).

The research in recent years has highlighted various ways of optimizing resources in salesforce management and suggested ways of focusing on objectives and incentives at the salesperson level. In fact, as in sales, the role of the salespeople's psychologic and motivational predisposition towards work and personal goals is rarely central. This fact is witnessed by a conspicuous literature which over the course of 40 years has

investigated the various nuances of the individual orientations of the salesperson, linking them not only to the individual outcome variables, but also to the company vision and features (Saxe and Weitz 1982; Sujan *et al.* 1994; Kohli *et al.* 1998; Harris *et al.* 2005). Another relevant aspect on the sales literature, related to the individual salesperson orientations topic, is motivation (Pappas and Flaherty 2006; Khusainova *et al.* 2018) since it is known to have an impact on the salesperson's performance.

In particular, for boundary spanning roles such as sales, orientation and motivation are not only relevant in an instant perspective: a way of looking at the combinations of attitudes, orientations, aspirations and motivational priorities in career evolution was observed and developed by the Career Stage framework (Cron *et al.*, 1988).

In particular, this work seeks to explore the individual salesperson domain, trying to understand which orientations and personal dispositions enable or favour the conduct of ambidextrous behaviours, i.e. balancing customers acquisition and retention efforts and time allocation. Furthermore, this work explores and verifies the impact of the career stage on this dimension. Assuming that young sales professionals are often required to do business development and customer acquisition, while the experience or permanence in a certain position for many years leads to superior customer retention

and relationship behaviours, it is possible that career stage has an influence on ambidexterity and ultimately on the performance and appreciation of own's work.

The various career stages have been used to understand the salespeople evolution and progress in their careers, as their attitudes and behaviours change (Flaherty and Pappas 2002b), describing the relation with performance, commitment, aspirations and turnover intentions, better than age and job tenure. Indeed, support was found for the career stage having a fundamental effect on how salespeople view their job and work environment, as well as the motivation (Cron *et al.* 1988) and the consequent incentive and reward system (Pappas and Flaherty 2006).

Within this overview of the sales literature and practice, this thesis work tries to contribute to the existing research by studying and portraying systematically the state of art of the sales ambidexterity literature, and then try to formulate research questions and develop empirical studies. Namely, chapter one includes a systematic literature review of the literature on ambidexterity, which became a hot topic in the sales literature in the last decade. The systematized literature suggested exploring the vast and longstanding research on the individual salesperson in chapter two, where the literature on individual orientations and motivation is presented. Particularly, the

motivational aspects and issued have occasionally be included the sales ambidexterity research, whereas the career stage framework represents an absolute novelty in the studies on ambidexterity and has been studied in depth, again in chapter two, trying to glimpse future empirical developments.

The third chapter presents the research objectives and methodology, as well as the data collection strategy of the qualitative study (deep interview) and of the quantitative study (survey and SEM). Chapter four contains the aims, results and discussion of both studies, exploring and studying the phenomenon and trying to contribute to the sales ambidexterity research, also highlighting limitations and possible future developments.

Chapter I - Sales and Ambidexterity

Introduction: current challenges for sales and ambidexterity

The sales and personal selling are changing rapidly and significantly in the last few years. The selling function is becoming more important for firms while, at the same time, is under stress from decreased effectiveness and increasing costs (Paesbrugghe *et al.* 2018).

Various authors (e.g. Cuevas 2018; Hughes and Ogilvie 2020) emphasize how the transformations of market, competition and technology, have transformed the role and sales activities, in both business and consumer contexts, prompted companies and organizations to reconsider many aspects of their strategies and approaches. However, at the same time, the sales activity has undergone a remarkable change: many models of sales force have been questioned, following the increase in new channels and technologies (Neslin and Shankar 2009; Sharma and Sheth 2010), as well as the important shift also in terms of activities carried out by the salesperson. In fact, Moncrief and Marshall (2006) describe 49 sales activities requested today from the industrial salesperson (BtoB) that were not present a few decades ago (Moncrief 1986).

A growing polarization of the sales activities is then noticed since, on the one hand, there is a growing systematization of the operations and sales activities (Parvinen 2013), thanks to digital technologies and third parties (for example distributors) who tend to want to optimize sales costs (Sharma and Sheth 2010), on the other hand, strategic customers have higher expectations, which require companies to make customer-specific investments, allocating dedicated resources and using co-creation of value (Lemmens *et al.* 2014; Töytäri and Rajala 2015).

With respect to this, Hughes and Ogilvie (2020) observe that while the importance of the sales role continues to increase (Cron *et al.* 2014), still many factors are hiding the importance of sales activities and roles on the value creating process (Cron 2017). As marketing shifted from a transactional to relational perspective (Anderson 1996), the role of the salespeople in the front line has become more and more crucial to value creation and customer satisfaction (Weitz and Bradford 1999). The sales process and role evolution have in fact followed a similar path and has enriched both, the customer and the salesperson, creating a novel interface. In the past, the sales efforts tended to focus on one-way communication with the customer, tactical goals and objectives linked to stimulating customer needs rather than satisfying them (Cespedes 1994), with a product-centered approach. Subsequently, the introduction of the service-centered

approaches to customer value creation (Vargo and Lusch 2004), has pushed organizations reconsider the value flow and direction, recognising the bi-directional flow of value with customers. Indeed, the enlarged vision of value creation processes has led to the increasing expansion of sales activities. The change in marketing paradigm has led to an increase in customer focus salespeople and consultants (Arnett and Badrinarayanan 2005). This, alongside automation practices who are moving transactional purchasing processes towards technology outlets (Sheth and Sharma 2008; Singh *et al.* 2019), led to decreased demand for salespeople who only meet transactional needs. Ultimately then, a new era of consultative sales has emerged and rewarded those salespeople that have evolved to join the new conditions of sale (Hartmann *et al.* 2018).

In this sense, sales behaviours that were once considered successful are now no longer considered adequate nowadays (Ahearne *et al.* 2010): for instance, sales approaches based on persuasion, of which current customers are more aware than in the past, are not only ineffective, but they also risk being perceived as manipulation, ending up irritating the client (Freese 2010; Evans *et al.* 2012).

In the sales landscape, especially in the BtoB, the simultaneous effort to search (hunting) and maintain (farming) customers can be considered a determining factor for the success not only of the sales unit, but also of the entire organization (De Carlo and Lam, 2016), particularly for mature companies (Nijssen *et al.* 2017).

Various authors (e.g. De Carlo and Lam 2016; Cuevas 2018; Vieira *et al.* 2019) in recent years are studying the skills, mechanisms, orientations and behaviours of organizations and individuals that allow the improvement of performances and sales. Scholars are studying new approaches that gives space to new opportunities, and respond to the growing pressures faced by organizations to put into practice methods and techniques for improving sales performance in increasingly complex contexts: ambidexterity in sales.

The concept of ambidexterity is already known and established in organizational strategy, innovation and learning at the organizational level. More recently, it has been applied to the individuals within the sales domain (De Carlo and Lam, 2016; Lam *et al.* 2019; Vieira *et al.* 2019) treating it as an orientation or behaviour of the salesperson towards the simultaneous pursuit of hunting and farming activities and objectives.

The following paragraph focuses therefore on the literature concerning ambidexterity, which in sales acquire a new perspective and focuses particularly on individuals, i.e. salespeople, as well as to the enabling and impeding factors and outcomes.

Ambidexterity in literature

In previous research, ambidexterity provides a metaphor for describing an organization's ability to simultaneously pursue different goals or perform seemingly conflicting tasks (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004; Lubatkin *et al.*, 2006). The term "ambidextrous" derives from the Latin "ambidexter-tri", referring to those who make use of both the left hand and the right hand, therefore ambidextrous means literally "right from both sides". In the humanistic literature, it is used to define someone as "gifted with different qualities or abilities, capable of various functions".

In fact, ambidexterity emerged as a possible simultaneous solution, as the ability to manage and overcome trade-offs, given that the environment (competitive, innovative, organizational) requires companies to carry out a series of critical, relevant and potentially conflicting activities. Previous research purposes that ambidexterity may allow overcoming a series of trade-offs, reconciling short term with longer-term organizational performances (March 1991; O'reilly and Tushman 2004; Tushman and

O'reilly 1996). Over the years, a body of research has emerged on the notion ambidexterity, although Raisch and Birkinshaw (2008) point out that "ambidexterity is still in the process of developing into a new research paradigm. . . research on organizational ambidexterity is strong in some areas, while weak or practically non-existent in others ".

In most cases, the concept of ambidexterity is applied to sales by referring to the contrast between exploration and exploitation (de Ruyter et al. 2014), similarly to how ambidexterity was originally defined, in the context of innovation. As is known, exploitation aims to refine and expand existing competencies and technologies to obtain positive, immediate and predictable returns, while the goal of exploration is the testing of new alternatives (for example, the development of new products), which produces uncertain, distant and often negative returns (March, 1991). Exploration and exploitation therefore create peculiar and, in some ways, opposite organizational problems. Indeed, exploration requires a focus on long-term goals, risk-taking and innovation, while exploitation deals with short-term goals, efficiency and production (Birkinshaw and Gibson 2004; He and Wong 2004). However, both are critical to long-term organization survival, so organizations should find the right balance. Successful companies have been found to be able to pursue both, exploration and exploitation, to

manage their market challenges, adapting simultaneously to internal and external changes. The literature (Levinthal and March 1993; Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004, He and Wong 2004, Lubatkin *et al.* 2006) supports the basic principle that ambidexterity improves performance, but successfully overcoming a trade-off means having faced and overcome the problem with a complex solution, which requires superior technological and organizational skills.

Ambidexterity has only become the subject of study of sales literature for a few years, under various approaches. The original ambidexterity concept as exploration and exploitation, could easily be analogically reported to the contraposition between short vs. long term goals, or applied to a product portfolio and therefore to the commercial areas and processes. Besides, the dualism of approaches can coexist at the level of a single activity or function, or as alternative orientations, which can possibly be reconciled, achieving multiple goals simultaneously.

It is worth highlighting that, since the early 1990s, the literature on ambidexterity has divided between the two main organizational approaches: structural ambidexterity and contextual ambidexterity (Marabelli *et al.* 2012). At these levels, ambidexterity can

thus be defined as structural and contextual (de Ruyter *et al.* 2014; de Ruyter *et al.* 2020).

Structural Ambidexterity (Gupta *et al.* 2006) is defined as an approach to solving problems through structural reconfiguration. This means that to achieve different and conflicting objectives, to solve tensions and conflicts of a temporal or organizational nature (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004), the organizational structure should be changed to constitute the optimal deemed (best-fit) configuration for their specific field of activity. This perspective maintains that ambidexterity can be achieved through the adoption of particular configurations (structures) of the organization (Duncan 1976), and therefore it indicates adopting, reassembling organizational previously independent units for achieving the intended purposes.

furthermore, beyond the ability and efforts of individual employees to simultaneously achieve multiple objectives, the organizational structure, processes and systems are identified as crucial facilitators in the construction of ambidextrous capacity. Many companies have created structures that have separate teams focused, for instance, on service or sales activities (de Ruyter *et al.* 2020).

On the other hand, some authors conceive ambidexterity as based on contextual factors, as **Contextual Ambidexterity** (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004) that pertains the company's organization besides the structure and the formal aspects, suggesting to create an organizational contexts (for example, leadership climate, intra- and inter-functional support) or coordination mechanisms (for example inter-functional interfaces) appropriate to achieve ambidexterity: alignment and adaptability within the same organizational unit. According to this perspective, acting on contextual elements, within the same formal structure, represents the most effective option for motivating people to work on complex tasks (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004; Mom *et al.* 2009). The ability of an individual to exhibit ambidextrous behaviour can therefore be facilitated (or limited) by the organizational context. More generally then, contextual ambidexterity refers to the collective orientation of all employees towards the simultaneous search for alignment and adaptability.

Moreover, Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) argue that, by designing processes and systems, an organization can build a supportive and trusted environment that motivates and allows employees to manage their own efforts to perform various tasks. Such a context facilitates the flexibility of employees in moving between different tasks with greater agility, allowing the creation of individual scaffolds at the employee level.

The characteristics of the organizational context linked to contextual ambidexterity are transformational leadership, empowerment and team support, which demonstrated to have a positive impact on achieving individual ambidexterity (Yu *et al.* 2013, 2015). Contextual ambidexterity is also multilevel in nature and extends even beyond the company's organizational boundaries.

To sum up, at the organizational level, ambidexterity has been applied at the functions, departments, business unit and levels. Then, numerous recent studies have applied ambidexterity at the individual level, based on the activities carried out. Several studies of sales literature have in fact addressed the topic in recent years (e.g. Jasmand *et al.* 2012; Van der Borgh and Schepers 2014; Cuevas 2018) as furtherly illustrated.

Ambidexterity in sales: Systematic literature review

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to ambidexterity in sales, which resulted in a relatively rich and heterogeneous scholarly activity. This circumstance provided the opportunity to include in this research project a systematic literature

review (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003; Thorpe *et al.*, 2005) to collect and analyse all the contributions on the theme of ambidexterity in the sales area.

The literature search criteria to obtain extensive coverage of the relevant research were carefully evaluated and implemented, as summarized in table 1.1. The search was conducted in three internet-based research databases (Scopus, Web of Science and Emerald). The search string was composed of the following keywords: (Ambidexterity OR Ambidextrous) AND (sales OR selling OR salespeople OR salesperson OR sales agent OR sales representative OR sales manager OR sales management), and the search included blind-reviewed journal articles and book chapters. Backward and forward searches were furtherly conducted to ensure full coverage of the relevant literature (Webster and Watson 2002).

The resulting lists of works were refined according to Inclusion criteria (topic: sales organizations, sales force management, exploration and exploitation) and Exclusion criteria (topic: innovation, IT, knowledge).

Table 1.1. Systematic literature review (results updated September 2019)

Phase	Keywords-based hits	Duplications	Exclusion based on title, abstract and text analysis	Selected studies
Database search	284	-28	-232	
• Scopus	47		-26	21
• Web of science	41		-26	3
• Emerald	196		-186	4
Backward search (Scholar)				0
Forward search (Scholar)				2
Total				30

Source: own elaborations.

The process yielded to 30 publications, furtherly descripted and analysed in content (descriptive and thematic analysis, as shown in the the appendix 1) (Tranfield *et al.* 2003). Particular attention was paid towards the sales ambidexterity definition, framework and measurement, as well as the organizational level of application. Furthermore, the antecedents and outcomes for a more complete understanding of sales ambidexterity (or ambidexterity in sales) were explored.

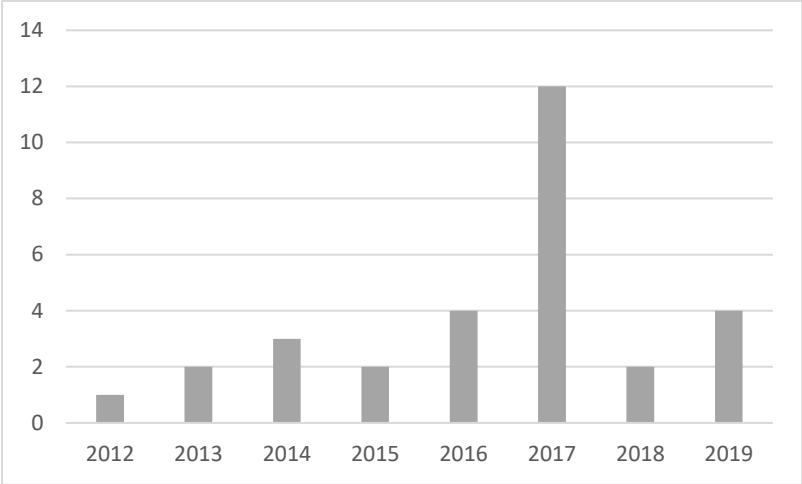
The types of studies and their methodological approach are shown in table 1.2. The majority (23) of the identified studies was empirical and 19 were built on quantitative methods, including some scale development works (Jasmand *et al.* 2012; Yu *et al.* 2013), that tested those constructs (particularly service-sales ambidexterity SSA) in many models, with various variables and across sectors and industries.

Table 1.2. Type of studies

Typology	**N studies**
Empirical	23
Theoretical	6
Qualitative: Interviews	3
Quantitative: Survey	19
Mixed Method	2
Total	30

Source: own elaborations.

Figure 1.1. Publications per year



Source: own elaborations.

As reported in figure 1.1., many of the studies were quite recently (2012-2020) published on internationally relevant journals (e.g. Journal of Marketing, European Journal of Marketing, Journal of Business Research, Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management)(see table 1.3) and ambidexterity in sales seems to be emerging as a novel and interesting approach to study sales organizations and personal selling practices.

Table 1.3. Study sources

Journal/Conference/Book	N studies
Journal of personal selling and sales management	4
Industrial marketing management	3
Journal of service research	3
Journal of the academy of marketing science	3
Management decision	3
Journal of business research	1
European journal of marketing	1
British journal of management	1
Career development international	1
Handbook of service marketing research	1
Ideas in marketing: finding the new and polishing the old	1
International journal of bank marketing	1
International journal of contemporary hospitality management	1
Journal of business strategy	1
Journal of marketing	1
Journal of product innovation management	1
Leadership & organization development journal	1
Thriving in a new world economy	1
Journal of business & industrial marketing	1
Total	**30**

Source: own elaborations.

As previously mentioned, in addition to the type of outlets and works on the topic, being the contributions very heterogeneous in terms of conceptualizations, definitions,

organizational level of application, the literature content was a key to organize and systematize the literature per type of market/selling (BtoB and BtoC) and per level of perspective (the organization / units , the management or the individual), as well as in many industries (service, retail, IT etc.)(table 1.4). This systematization allowed distinguishing the literature in categories and to observe that most of the contributions target the organizational and individual level, in coherence with the previous research (organizational ambidexterity) and with the scholar's call for further development of the individual level ambidexterity.

Table 1.4. Content analysis 1: levels

	INDIVIDUAL	**MANAGERIAL**	**ORGANIZATIONAL (units / teams)**
B2B	Jasmand *et al.* 2012 De Carlo and Lam 2015 Sok *et al.* 2015 Van de Borgh *et al.* 2015 Agnihotri *et al.* 2017 Gabler *et al.* 2017 Vieira *et al.* 2019 Mullins *et al.* 2020 Hughes and Ogilvie 2020	Nijssen *et al.* 2017 Cuevas 2018	Rapp *et al.* 2017 Nijssen *et al.* 2017 Cuevas 2018
B2B B2C	Rapp *et al.* 2013 Rapp *et al.* 2017 de Ruyter *et al.* 2019	Rapp *et al.* 2017	Nijssen *et al.* 2017 Rapp *et al.* 2017
B2C	Patterson *et al.* 2014 Faia and Vieira 2017 Lam *et al.* 2019 Becker *et al.* 2020	Van De Borgh and Schepers 2014 Panagopulos *et al.* 2019;	Yu *et al.* 2013 Yu *et al.* 2015 Ogilvie *et al.* 2017

Source: own elaborations.

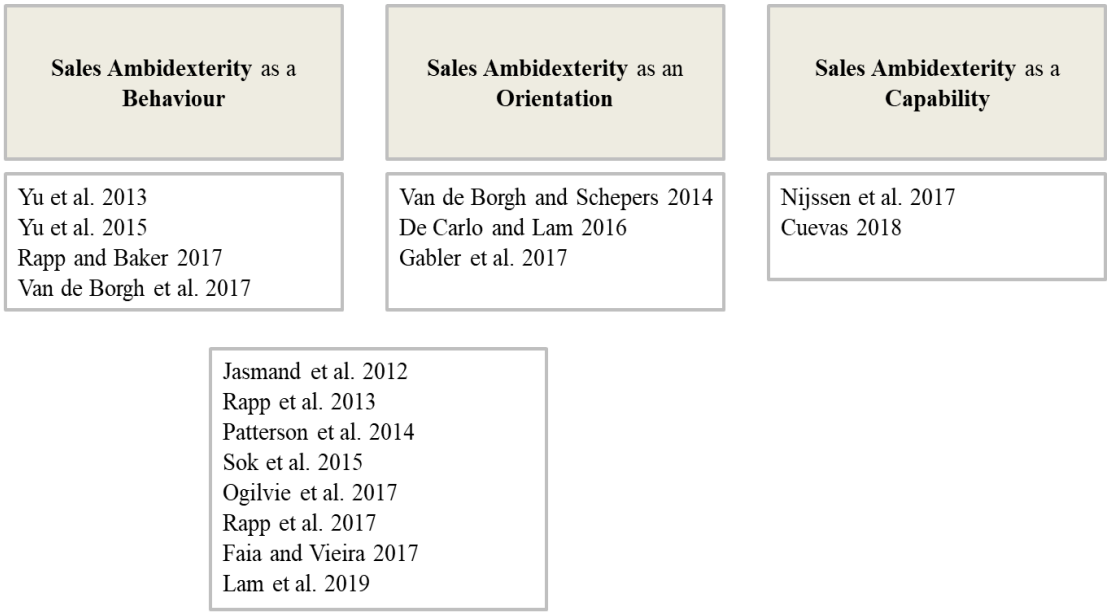
In particular, many of the works were conducted within service contexts. This context of services has in fact been extensively investigated in the literature, so much so as to define a separate stream, which will be illustrated later. From the point of view of the levels instead, the individual level refers to the application of the ambidexterity concept to the individual's activities, such as the front-line employee (FLE) goals during customer encounters or the salespersons' time allocation. In other works, the reference is to the managerial issues concerning the ambidexterity enablement, motivation and support, whereas other works refer to the whole organizations, to organizational units or teams, therefore the issues addressed in the individual works relate to reflections on sales ambidexterity but also involve the structure and intra-organizational coordination.

In addition, within the various contributions, the individual ambidexterity is simultaneously be defined as a behaviour or an orientation. It seems indeed that the majority of prior research on individual-level ambidexterity adopted a behavioural perspective (i.e., on the activities associated with exploration and exploitation), while recent developments in salesperson research suggested that trait-like variables could better predict ambidextrous behaviours (e.g., DeCarlo and Lam 2016; Jasmand *et al.* 2012). The latest contributions (Lam *et al.* 2019) have helped distinguishing and

conceptualizing the coexistence of these traits within an individual as *Orientation Ambidexterity* and distinguishing it from *Behavioural Ambidexterity* (as summarised in figure 1.2). This additional criterion was furtherly applied to the reviewed literature on ambidexterity in sales in the attempt to provide a useful categorization:

- Ambidexterity as an orientation (Van de Borgh and Schepers 2014; De Carlo and Lam 2016; Gabler *et al.* 2017)
- Ambidexterity as a behaviour (Yu *et al.* 2013, 2015; Rapp and Baker 2017; Van de Borgh *et al.* 2017)
- Ambidexterity as both orientation and behaviour (Jasmand, *et al.* 2012; Rapp *et al.* 2013; Patterson *et al.* 2014; Sok *et al.* 2015; Ogilvie *et al.* 2017; Rapp *et al.* 2017; Faia and Vieira 2017; Lam *et al.* 2019)
- Ambidexterity as a capability (Nijssen *et al.* 2017; Cuevas 2018).

Figure 1.2. Content analysis 3: behaviour, orientation or capability



Source: own elaborations on Lam, De Carlo and Sharma (2019).

The literature seems to lack a holistic and unique perspective on the topic and many approaches and definitions of ambidexterity coexist and get contributed. The literature seems to follow different definitions and strands, which are presented here as three different streams (see table 1.5).

The first one, *Service-Sales Ambidexterity (SSA)*(e.g. Jasmand *et al.* 2012; Yu *et al.* 2013, 2015; Sok *et al.* 2016; Agnihotri *et al.* 2017) defines ambidexterity as an orientation that motivates a series of customer services and cross / up-selling behaviour (Jasmand *et al.* 2012; Yu *et al.* 2013; Sok *et al.* 2015), and ambidexterity is simultaneous pursuit of service and sales during encounters with the customer.

The second research stream (Van der Borgh and Schepers 2014; Van der Borgh *et al.* 2017) studies ambidexterity as *Innovation-related Sales Ambidexterity* and refers to the ability of selling newly developed products, aside cross/up-selling (Van der Borgh *et al.* 2017).

The third research stream is *Acquisition-Retention Sales Ambidexterity* and refers to the conceptualization of *Hunting and Farming* acquiring and developing customers, (De Carlo and Lam 2016; Nijssen *et al.* 2017; Cuevas 2018; Lam *et al.* 2019), and sales ambidexterity is defined as the ability of simultaneously pursuing exploration and exploitation, as hunting and farming, undergoing transactional and relational selling, trying to align organization and performances at various organizational levels.

Table 1.5. Content analysis 2: streams

Streams	SSA: Service-Sales Ambidexterity	Innovation-related Sales Ambidexterity	Acquisition -Retention Sales Ambidexterity
Ambidexterity definition	*Ambidexterity as an orientation that motivates a series of customer services and cross / up-selling behaviour, as simultaneous pursuit of service and sales during encounters with the customer.*	*Ambidexterity as new product selling ambidexterity, aside cross/up-selling*	*Ambidexterity as acquiring and developing customers, as the ability of simultaneously pursuing exploration and exploitation, as hunting and farming, undergoing transactional and relational selling, trying to align organization and performances at various organizational levels.*
Studies	Jasmand *et al.* 2012 Sok *et al.* 2015 Rapp *et al.* 2013 Yu *et al.* 2013 Patterson *et al.* 2014 Yu *et al.* 2015 Agnihotri *et al.* 2017 Rapp *et al.* 2017 Rapp and Baker 2017 Ogilvie *et al.* 2017 Gabler *et al.* 2017 Faia and Vieira 2017 de Ruyter, *et al.* 2019 Panagopulos *et al.* 2019 Mullins *et al.* 2020 Becker, *et al.* 2020 Hughes and Ogilvie 2020	Van de Borgh and Schepers 2014 Van de Borgh *et al.* 2015	De Carlo and Lam 2016 Nijssen *et al.* 2017 Cuevas 2018 Lam *et al.* 2019 Vieira *et al.* 2019

Source: own elaborations.

The main streams on the theme are further illustrated as follows:

- Service – Sales ambidexterity
- Innovation related Sales ambidexterity
- Acquisition – Retention Sales Ambidexterity.

Service-Sales Ambidexterity

This group of authors defines service-sales ambidexterity as "the salesperson's commitment to providing customer services and increasing sales during interaction [service encounter]" (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2017).

In this stream of service-sales ambidexterity (Jasmand *et al.* 2012; Rapp *et al.*, 2013; Yu *et al.* 2013, 2015; Patterson *et al.* 2014; Sok *et al.* 2016; Agnihotri *et al.*, 2017; Faia and Vieira, 2017; Gabler *et al.*, 2017; Ogilvie *et al.*, 2017; Rapp, *et al.*, 2017; Rapp and Baker, 2017), ambidexterity was seen as an orientation that motivates a series of customer service and cross / up-selling behaviours (Jasmand *et al.* 2012; Sok, *et al.* 2015; Yu *et al.* 2013). As it is known, customer service includes activities such as identifying customer problems and providing a solution to customer complaints, while cross / up-selling requires employees to leverage existing relationships to sell

customers a new one. offer that may or may not be related to the initial product (Jasmand *et al.* 2012).

The majority of these studies have been designed and analysed in contexts of (BtoB and BtoC) service companies (banks, IT providers) starting from both customer care figures (e.g. Jasmand *et al.* 2012) and the front office (e.g. Yu *et al.* 2013, 2015; Gabler *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, this sales ambidexterity seems original albeit peculiar to this type of business, since it has been designed and applied to service roles and contexts, those can differ from the salesperson ones. There are certainly some elements of affinity in the activities carried out by service employees and salespeople, such as in the possible orientations of the individuals, however the definition of this activity has been largely conceived and tested in service contexts and in the BtoC sales, which are known to differ from the typical context and dynamics of the BtoB salespersons of reference in the sales literature. Although this stream seems to have theoretical and application boundaries in sales in service contexts, this is where the concept of sales ambidexterity was created first, and above all, most of the literary contributions belong to this stream, which has repeatedly demonstrated its explanatory and applicative validity. Therefore, the literature has developed in different and separated streams,

stemming from the original organizational ambidexterity literature and following or referencing the difference with the service sales ambidexterity definition.

The fundamental premise of this approach (Yu *et al.* 2015) is that while selling is commonly considered a profit-generating activity, the service provision represents an expense. Consequently, service and sales can be considered interdependent and related activities, since the sale of an appropriate item provides a satisfactory solution to the customer's problem, whereas the service excellence has, in turn, a propulsive effect on sales (Zeithaml 2000). This is fundamental for service, customer care or front desk roles, which often engage in the sale and delivery of the service at the same time, in the context of the same interaction with the customer.

More in depth, ambidexterity can also be defined as the "exploitation and exploration of two orthogonal activities that [can] interact positively" (Uotila *et al.* 2009), among which synergy opportunities are possible, resulting in superior performance (Smith and Tushman 2005). It is no coincidence that orthogonal measurement techniques are often used to evaluate activities that can be performed simultaneously, which is generally easier to define at managerial, group or organizational level than at individual level (Gupta *et al.* 2006). Consequently, it is not surprising that to capture these synergies

and interdependencies, i.e. service-sales ambidexterity at the individual level, scholars use a multiplicative measure developed by Jasmand *et al.* (2012).

Operationally, the sales activity (cross / up-selling) and that service provision are therefore identified as interconnected but distinct, which compete for scarce resources, making trade-offs inevitable in the simultaneous pursuit of both goals. Sales and service also have different foci: while service provision requires greater attention to reliability, courtesy and efficiency, in cross / up-selling the focus is the product knowledge, proactivity and engagement in not-routinely activities, to identify sales opportunities. Since these activities require different skill sets, different control mechanisms, motivation and compensation, the challenge of this new service-sales ambidexterity approach, lies in being omni-comprehensive: if the interaction with the customer requires that the individual (or the organizational unit) that interacts is predisposed to both activities, the orientations and the objectives must be redesigned to enable salespeople (or service providers) achieve these results, creating superior performance and customer satisfaction.

The sales-service ambidexterity can therefore represent a great opportunity, but also a series of contradictions and challenges. The application of such a multifaceted and

complex approach requires that sales (or frontline or customer care) staff know how to face multiple and conflicting objectives, which might create ambiguity and role conflicts. In this stream, the first and also the most flourishing, the dark side emerges as well. In particular, the subjects who carry out sales ambidexterity in this sense are subjects who are already on the organizational frontier and who with sales ambidexterity find themselves having to manage an even greater complexity of objective and tasks, which can lead to role conflict and overload. However, in most cases the mechanisms and organizational dynamics oriented to service-sales ambidexterity, if well thought out and managed, should allow to keep under control the role issues and job satisfaction, which can be overcome through motivation and self-confidence (Yu *et al.* 2015).

Many very recent works have also followed this stream and also the general individual sales ambidexterity definition (Mullins *et al.* 2020; Panagopulos *et al.* 2019; Becker *et al.* 2020; Hughes and Ogilvie 2020) or referring to the organization (de Ruyter *et al.* 2019).

Innovation related Sales Ambidexterity

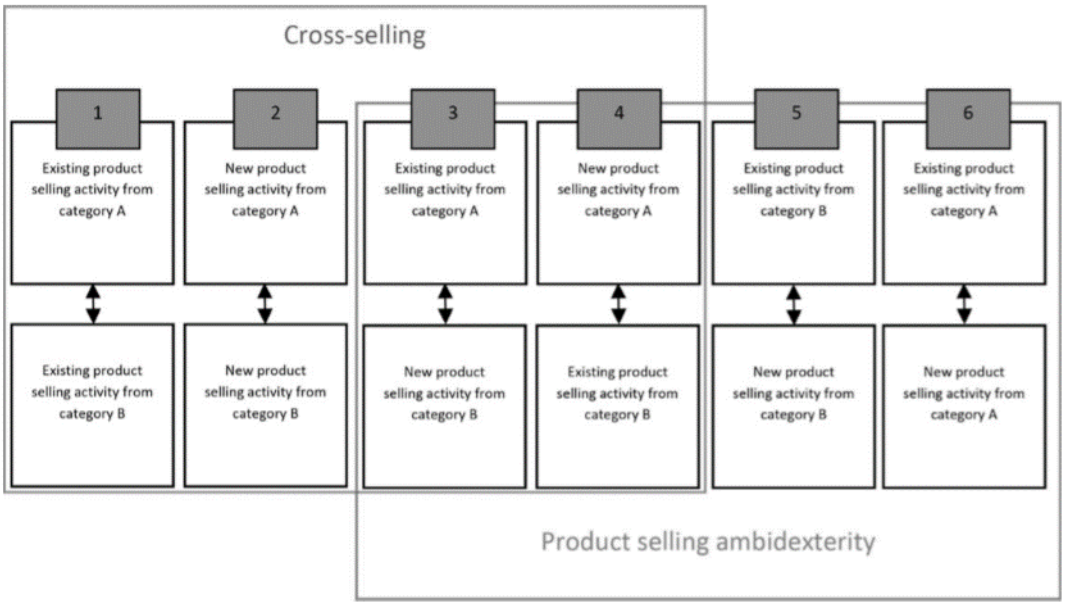
Previous studies have provided valuable insight on the role of ambidexterity in a sales context, however many of the contributions mentioned above, especially in the SSA, refer to situations where employees are in close proximity to their managers and operate in BtoC contexts or of service. Besides, this second sales ambidexterity definition focuses more on innovation and product (Van der Borgh and Schepers, 2014; Van der Borgh *et al.* 2017).

Van der Borgh and Schepers (2014) argue that salespeople in the BtoB sectors usually work in more complex contexts (than service and BtoC), characterized by lower levels of managerial monitoring of their daily activities and where most of the work is not easily predictable or standardizable. This series of circumstances has therefore led to the conceptualization of sales ambidexterity in the BtoB, linked to innovation and applicable to the orientations and behaviours of the salesperson.

Specifically, although the salespeople behaviours related to new and existing products share common elements on a cognitive level, salespeople must also face behavioural compromises regarding which activity to actually undertake and on what occasion. These two activities, the sale of existing products and the sale of new products, come

into play and confront each other, creating the sales ambidexterity applied to the product / innovation portfolio. Therefore, ambidexterity is defined as a product selling ambidexterity (see figure 1.4), stating that the sale of current products (cross-selling) and the sale of new products to be developed (product selling ambidexterity) are different phenomena, even if connected.

Figure 1.4. Cross-selling vs. Innovation related sales ambidexterity



Source: Van der Borgh et al. (2017).

In this stream in particular, scholars have focused on how leadership and motivation impact on the orientation and behaviour of the salesperson. Ambidextrous product selling, or innovation related sales ambidexterity, is seen in this stream as "the degree to which sales managers synchronize with salespeople on the pursuit of multiple product sales objectives". Hence, ambidextrous managers coordinate the equal importance of selling existing and new products, with a synergistic effect on the performance level.

Acquisition and Retention Sales Ambidexterity

The third and most recently developed definition of sales ambidexterity is that related to salesperson orientations (Cuevas 2018), in particular to customer acquisition and retention, also known as hunting and farming orientations (De Carlo and Lam 2016; Nijssen *et al.* 2017; Lam *et al.* 2019; Vieira *et al.* 2019). This type of ambidexterity, born and developed with all concepts taken from the sales research, seems the most original and full of implications for BtoB sales roles and activities, since it is not affected by innovation or service issues and dynamics, which are not applicable to all types of sales.

This perspective was developed by De Carlo and Lam (2016), those recalled the previous literature on salespeople orientations taking up the previous established salesperson orientation dimensions (SOCO, locus of control, and goal orientation), and purposed a new definition of sales ambidexterity, based on hunting orientation and farming orientation and behaviour. This type of approach further enriches the search for stimuli deriving from the literature and previous practice, but also gives the possibility to consider the correspondence between the characteristics of the salesperson, organizational configurations and various outputs, showing that coordination and synergy might result in better results in terms of goal achievement and superior performances.

According to Cuevas (2018) sales ambidexterity and paradoxical leadership are seen as possible solutions for management, to direct the sales force towards overcoming the trade-off. Moreover, scholars have seen sales ambidexterity as a possible response to the increasing polarization between transactional sales and relational / consultancy sales, which adds to the rest of the challenges of contemporary sales organizations. Moreover, the complexity of the context and the need to find a balance between the orientation of the salespeople, suggest enabling salespeople simultaneously achieve immediate and long-term sales results. In this sense, transactional sales and

consultative sales are put into dialogue with the orientation dimensions, since the first focuses mainly on reducing the costs of the service (i.e. achieving sales efficiencies), while relational selling emphasizes the co-creation of value with the strategic customers (i.e. achieving sales effectiveness).

In fact, the strategic management of key customers becomes increasingly complex for sales organizations and salespeople, full of conflicts and uncertainties, thus it might be appropriate to coordinate the activities between functions with similar objectives and adopt a new paradigm focused on the management of dilemmas and paradoxes (Storbacka 2012) by developing the ability to move from one goal to another (Lewis *et al.* 2014). This perspective therefore suggests applying sales ambidexterity as managing sales simultaneously in both a strategic and transactional way. For this reason, Cuevas (2018) argues that the BtoB sales organizations need "ambidextrous" sales managers and leaders, that is, they are willing to explore new ways of creating value, new relationship models between customers and suppliers, but also competent in implementation efficiency and improvement of sales processes and technologies. Ambidextrous sales managers should indeed implement control mechanisms for the efficient management of low-end customers and strategic management of high-end customers, creating optimal mixed control systems, avoiding counterproductive

discrimination and rigidity (such as those between hunter and farmers salespeople in the 1980s) (De Carlo and Lam 2016).

Once again, if sales ambidexterity conceives customer acquisition and loyalty as complementary sales objectives, pursuing conflicting goals (such as transactional and consultative sales, or as acquisition and retention, or hunting and farming), rises potential conflicts in allocating the resources and assessing activities and performance from the sales management (Nijssen *et al.* 2017).

Nijssen *et al.* (2017) focus on hunting and farming orientation, assuming that excellence is in acquiring new customers and maintaining and growing business with existing customers, in continuity with the hunting and farming orientation. Ambidexterity is thus conceptualized on an individual level, as a result of the coexistence of high acquisition and retention, or hunting and farming. Retention capabilities allow the sales force to create and maintain relationships with existing customers, for example, through and cross and up-selling, thus increasing margins.

De Carlo and Lam (2016), on the other hand, bring the attention to the individual salesperson's level and use the concepts of hunting and faming as a division into roles and personal characteristics of the sellers, which are taken up and illustrated in detail

in table 1.6. These authors are the first to apply the concepts of hunting and farming orientations to the study of sales ambidexterity.

Table 1.6. Characteristics of hunters and farmers according to practitioners,

Hunters	Farmers
• Order-getting, aggressive, self-motivated, risk taker, high tenacity and nervous energy, impatient, competitive goes out of his way to get new business. • "kill or be killed" • Typically, they are less analytical and are risk takers. • Very goal driven and evaluates success by their results of new business generated. • They live for moment and then move on to next target. • They have a personality that's OK with starting over each day. • Typically driver, task-oriented person, not emotional. They tend to have a plan and want to achieve their goal through their plan. • Tend to have more of a professional assertiveness and a strong desire to have a new win (for both the customer and the salesperson).	• Order taker, laid back personality, needs guidance, works better with a routinized customer assignment, attention to detail, relationship builders, excels at follow up, trustworthiness is a key personality trait. • Tend to be more analytical and more amiable, more project-oriented and more detailed. • They are conservative by nature and tend to avoid making mistakes. • Most salespeople are farmers. • They have a drive to compete but not as much as the hunter, but can develop new accounts if pushed. They are less of a risk taker than hunters. In order to create value for our firm, they need to do both. • Thick skinned. More determined than the average person. • Expressive types, have a pleasing personality – want to make others happy. • Don't like to take risks and have a difficult time thinking outside of the box. • Tend to maintain their base of customers, that they maintain thanks to their trustworthiness and efficiency

Source: own elaborations on De Carlo and Lam (2016)

In particular, hunting and farming used to be considered and measured as different constructs, as it is common in the salesperson's orientation literature (Saxe and Weitz 1982; Silver *et al.* 2006). It then emerged that the simultaneous propensity to both (high hunting and farming orientation), defined as ambidexterity, may lead to superior sales performance and better customer satisfaction.

Indeed, the complexity and relatively growing power of some buyers, especially in the BtoB, has resulted in and increased importance of acquiring and retaining customers at the organization level (Blattberg and Deighton 1996), which at the salesperson's level translates into hunting, i.e. acquiring new customers (e.g. contact, presentation, planning, interaction, sales) and farming, i.e. selling to existing customers (e.g. construction of long-term relationships, efficient order taking, cross-selling and up-selling) (Honeycutt *et al.* 2009, Moncrief *et al.* 2006). Previous studies have shown that BtoB salespeople perceive selling to already known customers as easier and less risky, than to try to acquire new customers. This phenomenon is associated with the characteristics of the market, but also with context and individual variables, which influence the attitude and activities carried out by the salesperson, as the literature on hunting and farming orientation claims (Vieira *et al.* 2019).

Therefore, from the desire to verify whether one orientation or the other is prevailing among BtoB salespeople or if they result in balance, allowing ambidextrous orientations, a new and important awareness has emerged in terms of discovery and implications. In fact, it seems that the best results and the most balanced performances at the salesperson level are obtained thanks to the simultaneity of approaches and orientations.

Figure 1.5. Ambidexterity as hunting and farming orientation

Hunting orientation	High	HUNTER	**AMBIDEXTROUS SALESPEOPLE**
	Low	-	FARMER
		Low	High
		Farming orientation	

Source: own elaborations on De Carlo and Lam (2016).

Although some organizations have tried in the past to implement this form of specialization between hunting and farming sales roles, some individuals may actually prefer or be predisposed to one or the other. However seems that ambidexterity, i.e. the presence of high level of both orientations and the balanced time allocation to hunting and farming activities (see figure 1.5), represent a better form of customer portfolio management in terms of satisfaction, in terms of individual performance. Once again, it means that role specialization in hunting or farming or personal preference towards one of the twos do not allow achieving the best performance for themselves, for customers and for the company. It is the simultaneity of the two orientations, the commitment in both hunting and farming activities, that leads to superior performance of the salesperson. Consequently, the salesperson orientation literature seems to point at sales ambidexterity as a possible and fertile new paradigm, opportunity, change of pace, for organizations in general and salespeople in particular. This new paradigm gives essential answers to very topical business problems: in fact, more and more companies are realizing that to be successful (or simply to survive) it is essential to interact with both categories of customers, the more and less relevant ones, in both a short and long term logic, both for hunting and farming (Cuevas 2018). Thus research and practice agree that the ambidextrous strategy of interacting with existing clients,

while generating new business, is the prerequisite to both survival and success in today's marketplace (Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008).

However, Lam *et al.* (2019) emphasize that BtoB salespeople are generally organized with territorial generalist forms and subject to scarcity of resources, but the mechanism according to which they allocate their time can reflect strategic objectives. Specifically, they focus on how salespeople allocate the time between activities towards new customers (exploration or hunting) and consolidated customers (exploitation or farming). Therefore this sales ambidexterity definition focuses on the time allocation and efforts with respect to the customer base.

Finally, Vieira *et al.* (2019) investigates the relation between salespeople's orientation and ambidexterity, combining the regulatory focus framework with the hunting-farming sales ambidexterity (De Carlo and Lam 2016). They have shown that that salespeople who implement an aligned ambidextrous behaviour – allocating effort to efficient maintenance of customer relationships (Carter *et al.*, 2014), while prospecting for future customers – achieved better sales outcomes, because ambidextrous behaviour reflects the alignment of two self-regulatory modes in the pursuit of complementary goals (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012). In aligning the two self-regulatory modes and

orientations, salespeople can reconcile “internal tensions and conflicting demands” (Raisch and Birkinshaw 2008, p. 375).

Conclusions

The ambidexterity paradigm was born in an innovative and organizational context and it has recently been applied to areas of organizations and individuals that deal with sales. Particularly in the sales research, the systematically revised literature show relatively limited (30) and very recent (most dated selected study is from 2012) contributions, comprising various frameworks and approaches. In particular, ambidexterity in sales has been studied across types of markets (both b2b and b2c) and organizational and individual levels and across various definitions: Service - Sales Ambidexterity; Acquisition – Retention Sales Ambidexterity; Innovation related Sales Ambidexter. Therefore, this heterogeneity of foci, definitions and applicability levels within and outside the sales organizations represent a fruitful domain of further investigation for sales research. In particular, the study methodologies applied in the revised literature are mainly quantitative, while the qualitative ones are less diffused. However, the studied literature still left many gaps to address by further research.

Chapter II - Theoretical framework: salesperson's orientations, foci and Career Stage

Introduction: the role of personal disposition and motivation in the sales profession

This chapter presents the rich literature that has described the orientations and behaviours of sales personnel over the past decades. Salespeople have always been studied as regards the dynamics of their personality and the way they approach work (Khusainova *et al.* 2018). Notoriously, the salespeople's role is at the edge of the organization and interacts with customers, competitors and many other stakeholders. Sales have over time evolved in paradigms (Weitz and Bradford 1999) and activities (Moncrief *et al.* 2006) but the impact of both organizational and personal orientations have always had and continue to have an impact on salespeople.

These personal orientations and dispositions continue to be used profusely in sales research and have also been extensively taken up in the sales ambidexterity research, which has often used them as antecedents. Therefore, the chapter illustrates the main

contributions on the salespeople orientations, followed by the relevant literature on the motivation. Particularly, given the impact of the salesperson's motivation to sales performance, job satisfaction and job tenure, the contributions relating to the theories and measures of motivation, also referred to in the literature on orientation, are examined. Finally, this theoretical chapter includes a paradigm of great interest in the sales area is that of the evolution of the salesperson over the career stages. In a few professions such as sales, indeed, scholars have dedicated such an attention to accurately describe the attitudes, dispositions, concerns and priorities of the professionals. Therefore, starting from the general adults' Career stage (ACCI) framework, the elements of motivation, satisfaction and attitude towards the career are presented through the Career stage framework (Cron 1984; Cron and Slocum 1986; Cron *et al.* 1988).

Salespeople's Orientations and foci

In a few other professions such as sales, the personal orientations and dispositions of professionals have received such attention in other disciplines and sectors. The main strands of individual orientations and foci, which then have an impact on salespeople's behaviour and ultimately on individual and company performance, are herein recalled.

Orientations in organizations and salespeople

Although the present study deals with the individual salesperson orientation and domain, it may be useful to recall the general orientation of the organizations, according to the literature on the individual orientations of the salesperson, and then continuing with an overview of the main orientations of the individual salespeople.

The body of literature on the organizations' orientation of is particularly vast, involves numerous disciplinary areas and has been the subject of analysis for over 50 years. Companies can adopt and follow one or more of these orientations, to compete and be successful, by focusing on different aspects (e.g. Jones *et al.* 2003). Previous research has illustrated company's orientations in a sequential and evolutionary logic, however generally the firms' orientations, and the underlying organizational culture, tend to remain stable and defined. The main focus of these studies is the organization (firm-level orientation) also for marketing and sales studies. It is important to recall the general companies' orientations, since they have an effect on the role and priority assigned to the commercial functions (marketing and sales) and consequently on their way of operating, as well as on performance.

In general, considering market orientation (Jaworski and Kohli 1993), the marketing concept serves as the foundation for the pre-eminent role of customers in planning and implementing market strategies. Being customer-oriented implies that the firm, at organization-level, is actively engaged in the generation, diffusion and reactivity to market stimuli (Kohli and Jaworski 1990). A firm orientation based on the concept of marketing has been associated with a customer orientation of the sales force. The marketing concept requires an integrated approach at the company level in which all the company's activities are aimed at providing customer satisfaction and establishing mutually beneficial and long-term relationships with its market (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Customer orientation therefore refers to an organizational culture that considers the customer as the focal point of strategic planning and implementation.

This attention to the customer has been frequently adopted in the last decades by companies from various sectors (e.g. Deshpandé *et al.* 1993). The success of this choice is attributed to the attention, implicit in this orientation, towards the customer. Customer-oriented companies have proven to be able not only to better meet the customers' needs, but also to anticipate their needs. In fact, the attention to the customer, to its characteristics, dynamics and needs, has meant that the customer-oriented companies have activated an organizational learning process which then

translated into a higher value attribution and greater customer satisfaction (Sinkula *et al.* 1997; Slater and Narver 1995). Therefore, customer orientation allows companies to acquire and assimilate the information necessary to design and implement marketing strategies that translate into more favourable results for customers (Brady and Cronin 2001).

Therefore, considering the studies on the salesperson's customer orientation, the literature includes two main paradigms, based on the different points of view adopted:

- The focus on salesperson customer orientation in salesperson-customer interactions, including Saxe and Weitz's sales and customer orientation (SOCO) (1982)

- The focus on achieving goals (salespeople's performance goal achievement using learning and performance goal orientation) (Sujan *et al.* 1994; Kohli *et al.* 1998).

While the first analyses the orientation towards the salesperson's performance and goal achievement, some have noted that there is an actual relationship between these dimensions: the learning orientation has a positive relationship with the customer

orientation, while the performance orientation has a positive influence on sales orientation (Harris *et al.* 2005) with consequences both in terms of performance and in terms of job satisfaction. Finally, as summarized in table 2.1, the combination of a new set of orientations has also been recently proposed, which are the hunting and farming ones of De Carlo and Lam (2016).

Table 2.1. Salesperson's orientations

	Selling orientation and customer orientation	**Learning orientation and performance orientation**	**Hunting orientation and farming orientation**
Representative study	Saxe and Weitz (1982); Harris *et al.* (2005)	Sujan *et al.* (1994); Harris *et al.* (2005); Kohli *et al.* (1998); Van de Walle *et al.* (1999)	De Carlo and Lam (2016)
Focus	Salesperson-customer interaction	Salesperson goal achievement	Salesperson-customer interaction and Salesperson goal achievement
Background	Selling and customer orientation as a state (Saxe and Weitz 1982) Selling and customer orientation as a trait (Harris *et al.* 2005)	Learning and performance orientation as a trait (Sujanetal.1994; Harris *et al.*2005) Conceptualized both as a trait and a state (Van de Walle *et al.*1999; Kohli *et al.*1998)	Basic personality type: regulatory focus affecting salesperson hunting and farming orientation as a surface trait (De Carlo and Lam, 2016)

Source: De Carlo and Lam (2016)

Sales orientation and customer orientation (SOCO)

Within the literature regarding the salesperson orientation within the salesperson-customer interaction domain, the work of Saxe and Weitz (1982) put the foundations, being the first to conceptualize the salesperson's orientation towards the customer (CO - customer orientation) and sales (SO - selling orientation) (SOCO).

In fact, the SOCO not only defines the orientation of the salesperson, but also put them into relation to the performance measures, thus giving a significant explanatory capacity to the instrument, since it is also associated with the performances obtained, a critical element for the sales organizations (Sharma *et al.* 2000) for survival and growth (MacKenzie *et al.*, 1998).

From both a theoretical and empirical point of view, the novelty was to conceptualize customer orientation and selling orientation not as opposite ends of a continuum, but as distinct constructs (Saxe and Weitz 1982), thus enabling to measure the prevalence of one or the other in a discriminating manner on the individual salesperson, making this approach relevant and influential. Subsequent literature has referred to this work in various areas, and the same measurement scale has also been reworked and made more compact and easier (Thomas *et al.* 2001) contributing to its diffusion.

Particularly, the customer orientation is defined by the authors as the tendency of salespeople to meet customer needs and the extent to which they like to do so, while sales orientation represents a focus on the activities that may involve short-term sales at the expense of customer satisfaction.

In particular, customer orientation is seen as the extent to which salespeople put the marketing concepts into practice, helping their customers make purchasing decisions that meet their needs (Saxe and Weitz 1982). For example, highly customer-oriented salespeople will tend to conduct behaviour aimed at increasing long-term customer satisfaction, avoiding customer disappointment, and excessive sales pressure. Therefore, according to the authors, customer orientation emphasizes the approach to customer satisfaction in the long term, compared to immediate sales, increasing sales performance and customer satisfaction in the short and long term (Brady and Cronin 2001).

In fact, the salesperson with a prevailing customer orientation will tend to achieve the set objectives, working with the customer (Thomas *et al.* 2001), avoiding deemed undesirable techniques (pressure, persuasion and manipulation), those can result

inadequate and impede the possibility of building relationships with the client (Franke and Park 2006).

In the first place, SOCO is important for organizations since it has an impact on the adoption of technological innovations, work attitudes, adoption of technology, relationships with employees and supervisors (Boles *et al.* 2001; Jaramillo *et al.* 2007). Regarding employee attitudes, SOCO influences elements such as job satisfaction, motivation, organizational commitment (Pettijohn *et al.* 2002; Siguaw and Honeycutt 1995). On the customer side, however, SOCO influences the development of customer relationships (Williams 1998), and satisfaction and loyalty (Gillis *et al.* 1998; Goff *et al.* 1997; Pettijohn *et al.* 2002).

Learning and performance goal orientation

The second main salesperson orientation framework focuses instead on the salesperson's orientation towards goal achievement, in particular on learning orientation and performance orientation (Sujan *et al.* 1994; Kohli *et al.* 1998; Van de Walle *et al.* 1999; Silver *et al.* 2006).

This stream shares some analogies with the SOCO framework, since it focuses more on the individual rather that the salesperson, comprising of both antecedents and outcome, i.e. the salesperson's performance, however the definitions and focus varies as it focuses more on the person, rather than on the salesperson. Moreover, the two types of orientations correspond to two types of people and two different types of salespeople.

The learning orientation directs subjects to improve their skills and to master the tasks they perform. It arises from an intrinsic interest in their work, a preference for stimulating work, a vision of oneself as curious individuals and a search for opportunities, autonomy of thought and action. A salesperson with a strong learning orientation will appreciate the process of acquiring knowledge, will be stimulated to find out how to sell effectively and attracted to difficult sales situations, as well as difficult to distract, given his great focus. It will be a professional who knows how to enhance the feelings of personal growth in the search for greater professionalism.

The performance orientation focuses on obtaining a positive evaluation of one's skills and actions, which arises from an extrinsic interest in one's work: the desire to use one's work to achieve external objectives. Therefore, the performance orientation is of a

salesperson who tries to obtain favourable assessments of his/her abilities, by his managers and colleagues, that tends to be hesitant to experiment with new approaches, fearing that these behaviours will translate into negative outcomes and consequently negative assessments of his/her skills and performance, thus tending to avoid complex and difficult sales situations.

These motivational orientations of people, and therefore of salespeople, from a psychological point of view tend to be defined and stable over time and are considered both traits and statuses of the person. The orientation towards learning and performance objectives, such as SOCO, are conceptualized as different, not opposite of a continuum, since the salesperson can pursue both simultaneously, that is, pursue the objectives of learning to do their job better, while demonstrating their abilities to others, or alternatively focus sometimes on one or the other objective.

This stream contributes to the salesperson's orientations literature adding to the personal and organizational dimension of sales. Indeed, theses orientations have allowed facing organizational considerations concerning motivation, incentive and training system with the individual dimension of the salesperson, as a professional and as an individual, highlighting the need for an overall vision.

This integrated vision was primarily portrayed by Harris *et al.* (2005). This work represents the conjunction between SOCO and goal orientations, those become antecedents of SOCO). Starting from the analogy between long-term orientation, associated with customer orientation and learning objective, and short-term orientation, associated with sales orientation and performance objectives, they investigate the result on the satisfaction of one's job. Attention is therefore placed on the fact that salespeople have, or develop, a particular orientation towards their job (job orientation), which consequently can also explain the results of the performance. For example, research has shown that a strong orientation towards the customer means that the salesperson also considers customer satisfaction personally positive and therefore perceives a high satisfaction with his work.

Salesperson's regulatory focus vs. mode

Notoriously, motivation plays an important role in the literature on salespeople, which is often associated or recalled by the self-regulatory focus and by the self-regulatory mode, here exposed, which have also been fundamental for the creation of ambidexterity concepts and measures in sales, together with the salesperson orientations.

With respect to **regulatory focus theory**, since sales roles have a certain degree of autonomy, past research has paid attention to the aspects related to decision making. In particular, Higgins (2002) emphasizes that day-to-day and apparently minor decisions are instead a means of achieving long-term and critical goals. Means and outcomes are two components of self-regulation. The third component is the regulatory orientation of a person. At any moment in time, a person has particular concerns or interests or values of reference that guide self-regulation (Crowe and Higgins 1997).

Regulatory focus represents the tendency of individuals to pursue goals through one of two self-regulatory motivational systems (Higgins 2002).

These concepts and theories have established in psychology and tested over a variety of industries and roles, indicating that these two self-regulatory goal systems can be predictive of distinct strategic behaviour inclinations, therefore regulatory focus allow, to some extent, predicting decision making behaviours related to goal achievement (Higgins 2002).

It comprises two traits or motivational states (Crowe and Higgins 1997):

- Promotion focus is concerned with advancement, growth, accomplishment. Astate reflecting an individual's sensitivity toward attaining positive outcomes, leading to an "eagerness" to use relatively creative and risky strategies, such as exploring for new customers as a means of increasing sales
- Prevention focus is concerned with security and responsibility motivational state that reflects the desire to avoid negative outcomes, resulting loss-avoidant behaviour, in "vigilant strategies" for goal attainment such as exploiting existing customer relationships to garner incremental sales.

In addition, similarly to the salesperson orientations previously reviewed, research indicates that prevention and promotion represent independent dispositions, which makes it possible for the same person to possess high or low levels of each orientation (De Carlo and Lam 2016).

On the other hand, the **regulatory mode theory** (e.g. Sok *et al.* 2016; Vieira *et al.* 2019) focus on the effort of realizing intentions into concrete outcomes: people assess what they currently have and figure out how to achieve what they want, then try to succeed in it.

This theory is fundamentally based on the self-determination theory, which suggests that there are different types of motivation that adjust goal-directed behaviours (Deci and Ryan 2000). And that when individuals are intrinsically motivated to perform tasks that are of personal interest or enjoyable to them, they are likely to perform these tasks spontaneously, without any coercion or reinforcement (Sok *et al.* 2016, p.145).

According to regulatory mode theory (Higgins *et al.*, 2003), there are two self-regulatory modes: assessment and locomotion (Faia and Vieira 2017).

- Locomotion regulatory mode (orientation) is "the aspect of self-regulation concerned with movement from state to state and with committing the psychological resources that will initiate and maintain goal-related movement in a straightforward and direct manner, without undue distractions or delays" (Kruglanski *et al.* 2000). The more locomotion-oriented employees are generally enthusiastic and oriented to opportunities, without any personal interest. These subjects are the most proactive and solution seeking (Jasmand *et al.* 2012), regardless of any personal benefit or cost. Salespeople with high levels of locomotion orientation prefer to take action toward achieving goals rather than sit and wait for things to happen (Benjamin and Flynn 2006).

– Assessment regulatory mode (orientation) is "the comparative aspect of self-regulation concerned with critically evaluating entities or states, such as goals or means, in relation to alternatives in order to judge relative quality" (Kruglanski *et al.* 2000). The more assessment-oriented employees are more concerned with appraisal and evaluation, therefore they usually seem more extrinsically motivated toward tasks, also considering the preoccupation with discrepancies, confronts etc., and less likely to be focused fully on the activity per se. For instance, salespeople can compare different ways of attending new customers or judge the effectiveness of different activities concerning customer retention, this might result in tendency to assess the value or importance of something for the purpose of understanding or taking action (Avnet and Higgins 2006).

Interestingly, locomotion and assessment constructs that are both related and independent (Higgins *et al.* 2003) and the latest contributions on the topic are significant contributions of the sales ambidexterity literature (e.g. Jasmand *et al.* 2012; Sok *et al.* 2016; Faia and Vieira 2017), remarking the importance of this framework in the construction and testing of individual ambidexterity in sales.

Moreover, previous research suggests that individuals need to evaluate the various decision options while they act toward the desired goals (Faia and Vieira 2017). Finally, based on self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 2000), high levels of both self-regulatory modes generate ambidexterity by balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation toward tasks (Sok *et al.* 2016).

These important frameworks allowed to put the foundation and further reflection over the sales ambidexterity literature in particular, since these all contributed to unify the regulatory framework, the situational factors with the personal orientations, behaviours and outcomes (performance, satisfaction etc.) of the individual salesperson. Moreover, these dimensions offer a fruitful opportunity to discuss the training, motivational and incentive aspects to the current research.

Salesperson motivation

As already stated, the salesperson's behaviours, performances, orientations, aspirations and motivation, have been relevant and researched for years.

The Contemporary Motivation Theories are generally presented as:

- Content theories: focusing on the employees need of reward and recognition, that can help managers design compensation plans and rewards. It comprises hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow 1954), ERG theory (Alderfer 1969), need theory (McClelland *et al.* 1953), dual factor theory (Herzberg *et al.* 1959)
- Reinforcement orientation theories: also known as organizational behaviour modification theory (Skinner 1953)
- Process theories: focusing on the goals and rewards that motivate people, trying to explain the employees' thought process and identify actions to fulfil their needs. It comprises equity theory (Adams 1965), expectancy theory (Vroom 1964), attribution theory (Kelley 1967), goal setting theory (Locke and Latham 1990).

Aiming to recall the salient theories in the sales domain, here are further presented the process theories of motivation and particularly the agency theory and the expectancy theory.

The standard **Agency theory**, which derives from the General Game Theory, involves that a principal (which is assumed to be risk-neutral) employs an agent (which is assumed to be risk averse) to act on his behalf (Kunz and Pfaff 2002): the agent possesses private information that is not costlessly available to the principal, regarding

for instance his/her effort or the state of nature and he/she is presumed to choose actions to maximize own utility, while being work averse (maximize overall utility resulting from payoffs both, on and off the job). The combination of information asymmetry and agent's aversion both to work and risk, impedes cooperative behaviour. In addition, the resulting output (performance) is due to the agent's effort, as well as exogenous factors (situational, contextual etc.) therefore the principal cannot infer the agent's performance from the overall result. Thus, according to the authors, while designing the relationship with a contract or a reward and incentive system, the principal must involve the agent by linking their reward/income to the overall business and production risk. According to standard agency theory, an optimal incentive contract involves a pay-for-performance scheme which ties the agent's pay-off to production indicators which (partially) correlate with his effort level. The derivation of the optimal contract results from a mathematical program maximizing the principal's objective function, subject to several constraints, e.g. production and technology constraints and the agent's characteristics, e.g. risk and work aversion, information, action space and reservation utility. Consequently, the principal offers a contract to the agent, who then chooses those actions that maximize own overall utility restricted by contractual constraints, trading off between effort costs against the expected utility resulting from the monetary (salary) and non-monetary (prestige) consequences of the decision.

In previous organizational research, agency theory has been widely applied when studying the pay-performance relationship (e.g. Bloom and Milkovich 1998). Nevertheless, scholars have also enhanced the key limitation to the agency theory approach, the strong assumption on salespeople and sales agents are risk-aversion; therefore, the full-range of employee attitudes and behaviours may not be captured (Bloom and Milkovich 1998). Consequently, researchers in this have suggested using motivational theories including expectancy theory to further our understanding of compensation programs (Pappas and Flaherty 2006).

The **Expectancy Theory** (Vroom 1964), on the other hand, proposes that an individual's motivation is jointly driven by three components, those ultimately combine to affect the salesperson's (both intrinsic and extrinsic) motivation (e.g. Cron *et al.* 1988). Based on Boachie-Mensah (2010), motivation comprises of:

Motivation = Expectancy * Instrumentality * Valence

- Expectancy of performance or estimates of the probability that effort will affect performance. For instance: the salesperson believes that more calls per week will generate more sales, this person has high effort-performance expectancy.
- Instrumentality or estimates of how strongly performance is believed to lead to

reward. For instance: if the same salesperson believes that sales increase will lead to winning a sales contest, this person has high performance-outcome expectancy.

- Valence for rewards or measures of an individual's desire for the reward. For instance: if winning the context is really important for the subject, and the prize is high, the salesperson will result highly motivated, otherwise, if the prize is very small, the overall motivation will drop, due to the multiplicative shape of the motivation function. All three elements of motivation must be high in order to have high motivational levels.

This theory had an important impact on sales management theory and practice, as sales managers can understand how to foster salespeople's motivation and maximize performance (Sager *et al.* 1998): environmental improvements, training, support and encouragement can increase expectancy and facilitate performance; make sure that performance is followed by instrumental positive outcomes such as recognition, praise and rewards; identify positive valence outcomes by figuring out what salespeople want to succeed in, to fulfil through their work, meditating on what the job provider or not. In general, sales manager should create expectation that salespeople's efforts will be rewarded within and outside the actual job related outcomes (Boachie-Mensah 2010).

The majority of research based in the expectancy theory framework has focused on identifying variables that influence valences, expectancies, and/or instrumentalities, especially on the organizational level. Most of the studies that have focused on individual-level variables have focused solely on reward valences (e.g. Ingram and Bellenger 1983; Churchill *et al.* 1979), while others (Pappas and Flaherty 2006) provide an examination of the role individual differences play in determining salesperson motivation across valences, expectancies, and instrumentalities, and considering how individual differences between salespeople influence reactions to firm.

This expectancy theory is therefore quite widespread in the sales literature but also referred to by various contributions on sales ambidexterity, as well as by numerous other contributions that instead implies it alongside more diachronic and longitudinal concepts and frameworks on the salesperson, as an individual and as a role: the career stage framework.

Career stage perspective: from Super to Cron and beyond

Career stage theory is rooted in vocational psychology and sociology and has developed over the decades, particularly in the sales domain, due to the great attention to the person and role related to the boundary sales function (Jones 2005).

Most of the research concerning career stages has been based in one of several approaches including Super (1957) and Levinson *et al.* (1978) (Flaherty and Pappas 2002b).

Super (1957)'s model of career development, further developed in 1988 in ACCI Adult Career Concerns Inventory (Super *et al.* 1988), is a life-stage theory of career development characterized by: (a) the identification of different developmental tasks at different stages, (b) the formulation and implementation of the self-concept in vocational terms, and (c) the construct of vocational maturity, which was intended to index one's readiness to engage the tasks at each stage. The career stages and features are summarized in table 2.2. As most stage theories, these stages were conceived as sequential, overlapping, and prepotent. The characteristic of prepotency represents a sort of hierarchy and consecution criterion based on which the failure to accomplish

the tasks of the stage at hand inhibit one's capacity to deal successfully with the tasks of the stage that followed.

Table 2.2. Career stage definition

Adult Career Concerns Inventory (ACCI)	**Exploration**	Crystallization	Recognition of desired professional levels and fields
		Specification	Consistent expression of a specific profession, or employment, related to the previous choices
		Implementation	Selection of a goal and an action plan for its implementation
	Establishment	Stabilizing	Development of an appropriate lifestyle, characterized by autonomy and a relevant use of skills and training
		Consolidating	Concern with the achievement of security in the profession and in the organizations in which one person is
		Advancing	Concern about the possibility of progress in the financial plan and for more challenging levels of responsibility
	Maintenance	Holding	Concern about the maintenance of the status and the position acquired in a given profession
		Updating	Need to be attentive to new developments as the professional field and the individual goals change
		Innovating	Need to explore or do things differently
	Disengagement	Deceleration	Possible need to reduce the role of worker
		Retirement Planning	Concern resulting from the desire to withdrawn from the professional activity
		Retirement Living	Transition to retirement, that is, decrease in the importance credited to the role of worker over other life roles

Source: Silva et al. (2011)

Evidence suggested that adult career success and satisfaction, measured in a variety of ways, was related to certain identifiable conditions in adolescence, including: (a) awareness of, and concern about, the need to make plans; (b) knowledge and use of resources for planning; (c) understanding the characteristics of the world of work; (d) decision-making skill; and (e) knowledge about the conditions of one's current occupational preference (Cairo *et al.* 1996).

Subsequently, Levinson *et al.* (1978) also suggest that employees pass through distinct career stages that are characterized by specific work tasks and periods of psychological adjustment. However, Levinson's digresses from Super's proposing that stages are based solely on age, therefore the actual job concerns or attitudes of employees are never elicited.

Building on the earlier work, Cron (1984) developed a career stage framework for the sales personnel, in which individuals are expected to experience four career stages, including (1) exploration, (2) establishment, (3) maintenance, and (4) disengagement. These stages have been used to understand the fact that salespeople will progress through their career in which their attitudes and behaviours will change (Flaherty and Pappas 2002b).

Cron (1984, 1988)'s work is particularly important in the sales research as the career stage framework (see table 2.3) was born and applied primarily to the salesforce. The characteristics of the job and career in sales, including high turnover and the boundary spanning nature of the role, have therefore been specifically considered in the development of this framework. Moreover, the career stage framework allows to predict performance, commitment, aspirations and turnover intention better than age and job tenure, refraining the predictive and explicative power of this framework on theoretical and practical basis.

Table 2.3. Cron's career stage characteristics

	Exploration	**Establishment**	**Manteinance**	**Disengagement**
Career Concerns	Finding an appropriate occupational field.	Successfully establishing a career in a certain occupation.	Holding on to what has been achieved, reassessing career, with possible redurection.	Completing one's career.
Developmental tasks	Learning the skills required to do the job well. Becoming a contributing member of an organization.	Using skills to produce results. Adjusting to working with greater autonomy. Developing creativity and innovativeness.	Developing broader view of work and organization. Maintaining a high performance level.	Establishing a stronger self- identity outside of work. Maintaining an acceptable performance level.
Personal Challenges	Must establish a good initial professional self- concept.	Producing superior results on the job in order to be promoted. Balancing the conflicting demands of career and family.	Maintaining motivation though possible rewards have changed. Facing concerns about aging and disappointment over what one has accomplished. Maintaining motivation and productivity.	Acceptance of career accomplishments. Adjusting self- image.
Psychological needs	Support. Peer acceptance. Challenging position.	Achievement. Esteem. Autonomy. Competition.	Reduced competitiveness. Security. Helping younger colleagues.	Detachment from organization and organizational life

Source: Cron (1988)

Based in Cron's (1984) work, salespeople in the exploration stage are most concerned with finding a job where they feel comfortable. Commitment and performance are likely to be low. Salespeople in establishment have begun to make a commitment to a certain occupation, they are concerned with securing a solid position in this particular occupation, therefore they tend to be higher performers, also concerned with promotion opportunities. In maintenance, salespeople continue to perform at a high level (Cron and Slocum 1986), although desire for promotion. Finally, salespeople in disengagement are said to be progressively more and more psychologically detached from the job, no longer committed to the career, and tend to be lower performers (Cron and Slocum 1986).

Career stage theory has been operationalized in a number of ways, providing a better description of employee and salespeople status, preoccupation and needs, overcoming the attempts to use age, length of tenure, and a variety of other inconsistent measures of the stages across studies. Nevertheless, prior research also enhances the fact that the framework might be outdated for today's career landscape, as well as misrepresent some situations (for instance a late career shift or keeping the same type of role in another industry) (Sullivan 1999).

To effectively capture these "recycling" nuances of careers, Pappas and Flaherty (2006) implement a self-selection measure of career stage, where respondents were asked to read four passages corresponding to each of the four career stages defined in the work of Cron's works (Cron and Slocum 1986; Cron *et al.* 1988) and to self-select a stage. Instead of relying on age or tenure measures, employees are free to select a stage based on their current career concerns.

In general, support has been found for the career stage framework and the proposition that career stage has a fundamental effect on how salespeople view their jobs and work environments, as well as the motivation process (Cron *et al.* 1988) and consequent incentive and reward system (Pappas and Flaherty 2006).

However, Miao *et al.* (2009) have argued that besides there is no doubt that the motivation framework contributes substantially to further describe salesperson performance and success, career stage should be better described by Intrinsic-Extrinsic motivational frameworks, with distinct cognitive and affective dimensions that have unique nomological networks. Besides, the career stage still represents a fruitful framework to investigate the salesperson individual domain, adding an enriching diachronic perspective.

Conclusions

The overview of the literature on the orientations, foci, motivation and career stage of the seller, demonstrates how important and relevant these dimensions have been over the years for the sales research and practice. In fact, in few other disciplines such as sales, this level of attention has been paid to the behavioral aspects of the salesperson, since in fact, being boundary spanning professionals and with a high cognitive and experiential involvement, their perceptions and behaviours have a significant impact on work, on personal and company results. In fact, the literature has shown how important it is to predict the behavior of the salesperson and understand which features and characteristics were linked to both individual and company performance, but also to a perception of one's role and appreciation of one's work. Consequently, these studies emphasize which orientations to privilege and encourage in the salesforce, but also how to look at people's professional and individual priorities and motivations, in order to consequently reason, design and implement adequate control, incentive and training initiatives. Previous research has profusely used concepts and measures including salesperson’s orientations and motivation in investigating sales ambidexterity, but there are still many research gaps. In fact, not all the definitions of orientation have been studied in all the definitions of sales ambidexterity, nor, so far, has the dimension

of the career stage ever been studied in reference to sales ambidexterity, which will be done in the continuation of this work.

Chapter III - Methodology

Introduction: aim, scope, design

The present work attempts to build on the literature concerning sales ambidexterity and has developed with engaging the salesperson individual perspective. Lacking a unique framework of prior research including both the ambidexterity elements and the career stage, the opportunity of conducting a preliminary exploratory analysis rose and took shape in the deep interview phase of analysis.

Starting from the definition of ambidexterity as the orientation to balance behaviors and efforts of exploration and exploitation of the customer base (DeCarlo and Lam 2016; Vieira *et al.* 2019), that is particularly indicated for studying the BtoB selling context. Hence, this work aims to observe whether and how sales ambidexterity is performed by salespeople and developed over different career stages, using the deep interview methodology (McCracken 1988; Granot *et al.* 2012). In particular, this works aims exploring the dynamics through which BtoB salespeople approach their customers, whether the same salesperson in some markets is motivated to behave as

both hunter and farmer across the customer base or if they are more prone to specialize within one of the two roles, or even whether they are left free of achieving their quotas and specializing on the types of customers they choose, following personal traits and dispositions. In a way, this initial study wants to explore the way salespeople allocate their time and resources over the customer base and to observe whether some types of salespeople, with more or less years of experience, behave. Therefore, sales professionals were selected to portray the variety of personal dispositions, sectors, experiences, background and career stages, to foresee their personal narrations and perceptions surrounding the theme of sales ambidexterity.

The second research phase, building from the qualitative study research, aimed instead at verifying the existence and strength of relationships between the constructs regarding the orientations and dispositions of salespeople across career stages, in relation to sales ambidexterity, effectiveness, performance and job satisfaction. The following paragraphs deepen the methodologies used in this integrative research design, comprising a qualitative and quantitative study.

Study one: The deep interview methodology

The semi structured deep interview

The first empirical phase was designed according to the semi-structured deep interview methodology (McCracken 1988; Charmaz 2008; Granot *et al.*, 2012). According to Granot *et al.* (2012) the purpose of in-depth interviewing is to explore the experience of others and the meaning they make of that experience, resulting especially beneficial when motivated to provide "thick descriptions" when the main objective is to achieve deep understanding of participant thought paths and decisions. Consequently, this methodology assumes that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience, which is especially important in a B2B context. In fact, on one hand, observation would provide access to managers' behaviours, surveys would restrict their ability to both provide personal input and make meaning of their experiences. On the other hand, interviewing allows to put their behaviour in context and to understand their actions (Charmaz 2008). Indeed, this methodology was chosen to allow data collection and analysis in an iterative and narrative way, to portray and explore all the possible and rich elements of this phenomenon and to search for variation in studied categories or process.

This research phase entails the grounded theory perspective, that allow flexibility in each interview conduction, as information gets learned in prior interviews (Corbin and Strauss 2015). Moreover, the grounded theory approach emphasized steps and procedures for connecting induction and deduction through the constant comparative method, comparing research sites, doing theoretical sampling (Morse 2010), and testing emergent concepts with additional fieldwork.

Data collection: strategy and implementation

The data collection relied on a purposeful sampling procedure (Patton 2002), following the maximum variation criteria in terms of age of the subjects and years of experience, types of industry (ICT, pharmaceutic, beauty, fashion, automotive, food, technical equipment), size and level of internationalization of the employer or mandated company. All the subjects involved work in the BtoB sector, as previous research has investigated studied ambidexterity in service or retail environments, but the type of selling and peculiarities addressed in this research are more coherent a BtoB research setting. In addition, the sample purposefully included salespeople, area managers and sales managers, to strengthen the overall results. The maximum variation criterion in the interviewee selection process ensured heterogeneity within the sample, that allowed to represent the vast sales practice scenario across industries and ages, as well as

different job tenure among the salespeople included (N=11). This sample selection criterion ensured information saturation and the spontaneous emergence of relevant topics.

The length of each interview ranged from 20 to 60 min. After all interviews were completed, the research team met to go over the notes and corroborate the findings. Any questions or inconsistencies the research team had with the data were clarified by telephone call-backs to the key informants, to enhance the validity of the study.

A script (Castillo-Montoya 2016) allowed the researcher to follow the research protocol and touch all the relevant themes, (see table 3.1.) focusing on: 1) Customer vs Selling orientation 2) Learning vs performance orientation 3) Short vs Long-term goals 4) Hunting vs Farming orientation 5) assessment, quota, rewards, incentives, goals and metrics, motivation vs incentives 6) perception of technology (enabling or replacement). The linguistic adaptation of the concepts in data collection and analysis was ensured by the researcher's experience (Italian native speaker) and according to Brislin's (1990) back-translation method by a different translator to ensure both versions reflect the same content and meaning. The questions were carefully designed

to be unobtrusive and nondirective and to avoid the potential pitfalls of "active listening" (McCracken 1988).

Table 3.1. Interview guide

Describe your customers (what kind of companies, how you interface with them, how often you contact them, how often they contact you and for what)
Tell me more about your career (Career stage).
(Customer oriented Selling) what you think is important in the work of the salesperson, what you focus on, what is your objective (Short/long term goals)
(Learning vs performance orientation) between the two, do you think you are a person who aims more at achieving results or experience and growth?
(Locomotion vs Assesment) Do you tend to pay attention to the process and proactivity or objectives to be achieved and to the evaluation you will undergo, for example to compare yourself with others?
(Ambidexterity) How would you define your time management towards customers? More oriented to serve existing customers or to acquire new ones?

Source: own elaborations

Data analysis

The data analysis followed the principles of grounded theory coding, involving open, axial, and selective coding (e.g. Strauss and Corbin 1998). Firstly, the open coding was performed, paragraph by paragraph, using transcribed text to identify the interconnections between individual personal orientations and the sales technological environment. All emerging themes were coded with descriptive codes (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The properties and dimensions of the initially identified concepts were furtherly investigated, and relationship were traced. In the final selective coding step, the dimensions, outcomes, and contingency factors were designed into a conceptual framework. In this phase, the internal consistency and wording were refined, relevant key quotations were selected from the sample transcripts. The aim of this phase of analysis was to obtain data saturation in the analysis phase, even when using data from a diverse set of respondents, supporting the validity of the findings.

To improve the authenticity and trustworthiness of the results, several consolidated protocols for qualitative research were implemented (Lincoln and Guba 1986). Finally, reliability of the findings was strengthened by clearly defined questions, specifying paradigms and constructs, using complete backstage information, reporting the overall

data collection and processing, considering opposite hypotheses (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 278).

Study two: The survey methodology

Aim, model design and hypotheses development

A quantitative analysis was furtherly undergone to portray the relationships and impact of salespeople's orientations and Sales Ambidexterity across Career Stages, on the main sales outcomes (Sales Performance and Job Satisfaction), with added mediation of Customer Acquisition and Retention Effectiveness.

Furthermore, on the antecedent side, the relationships with the individual orientations of the salesperson that have not been already tested in the ambidexterity (as hunting and farming) literature, such as customer orientation and goal orientation, will be investigated. The aim is to contribute to the literature on the topic and to observe whether previous research and this study's qualitative analysis find support.

Finally, the last research aim is to study if and to what extent the career stage can represent a moderator in the relationship between ambidexterity and outcome variables. In fact, no study has so far analysed the role of the "salespeople's life cycle", including their career assessment, the role of expectations, priorities, career concerns on their behaviours and outcomes.

The choice of PLS-SEM was determined by the research objectives: in situations where theory is less developed, researchers need an alternative approach to examine structural models if the primary objective is not theory confirmation provided by CB-SEM. Thus, because of its prediction orientation, PLS-SEM is the preferred method when the research objective is theory development and prediction (Hair *et al.* 2011) and is particularly indicated for complex models comprising of many constructs and indicators.

Measures sources

All the measures used in this work are taken from the literature, the complete list of items is available in Appendix 2 and summarised in table 3.2.

The central construct of the model, namely Sales Ambidexterity, was taken from the literature defining sales ambidexterity as hunting and farming (De Carlo and Lam 2016; Lam *et al.* 2019; Vieira *et al.* 2019), taking the Acquisition orientation (AO) and Retention orientation (RO) from Lam *et al.* (2019). This concept of ambidexterity was born and tested within the salesperson individual orientation literature and therefore has been flanked by various concepts and constructs pertaining this domain. Hence, to study the antecedents' side, stated that the relationship of ambidexterity with self-regulatory mode was already established (Vieira *et al.* 2019), this work focuses on goal orientation, which is a novelty in this stream but has already been tested within the SSA stream (Jasmand *et al.* 2012). In particular, the goal orientation measures taken from Silver *et al.* (2006) considers learning orientation (LO), performance approach orientation (PAP) and performance avoidance orientation (PAV), as the focus on avoiding performing poorly and on being evaluated negatively. Customer orientation (CO)(Johnson and Friend 2014) was also included to complete the set of orientations and following the literature on ambidexterity (Jasmand *et al.* 2012; Vieira *et al.* 2019), as it is said to have major impact on performance, effectiveness and attitude towards the profession (Harris *et al.* 2005).

On the outcome side, the self-reported performance measurement (PERF)(Homburg *et al.* 2011) was included. However, since the performance itself does not give details on the composition of the customer portfolio and on the effectiveness towards the acquisition and retention of customers through the attitudes and actions of the salespeople, measures of effectiveness of the acquisition and retention of customers were created and inserted to give more details on the side of ambidexterity outcomes, trying to enrich the discussion and the implications. Particularly customer acquisition effectiveness (CAE) was adapted from Jolson (1997) and customer retention effectiveness (CRE) was adapted from Crosby *et al.* (1990). An output measure for the career stage literature was Job satisfaction (JSAT), which was included from Guenzi *et al.* (2019).

Moreover, the inclusion of career stage measures is of great importance. To date, this framework has never been applied to sales ambidexterity, besides the career stage perspective by Cron (1984, 1988) has demonstrated its predictive and explicative power over the years across many empirical investigations on the salespeople motivation, behaviour and performance. Cron (1988)'s original measure comprised 60 items and was furtherly elaborated in subsequent research, creating more parsimonious measures, which have been used in following sales research works and herein adopted.

In particular, the Career stage (CS1) of Perrone *et al.* (2003) was computed in the model as a formative measure and a moderating factor, while the Flaherty and Pappas (2002) (CS2) self-selection measure was considered among the sample descriptive dimensions.

Table 3.2. Summary of Measures

Construct Name, Source and Anchor
Salesperson Learning Goal Orientation (LO) (Silver *et al.* 2006) 7-point scale, "1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree"
Performance-Approach Orientation (PAP) (Silver *et al.* 2006) 7-point scale, "1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree"
Performance-Avoidance Orientation (PAV) (Silver *et al.* 2006) 7-point scale: "1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree"
Customer orientation (CO) (Johnson and Friend 2014), based on Plouffe *et al.* (2009)) 7-point, "1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree"
Acquisition orientation - Hunting (AO) (Lam *et al.* 2019) 7-point scale, "1=does not describe me at all and 7=describes me very well"
Retention orientation - Farming (RO) (Lam *et al.* 2019) 7-point scale, "1=does not describe me at all and 7=describes me very well"
Performance (PERF) (Homburg *et al.* 2011) 7-point scale: "1=much worse" to "7=much better"
Salesperson's evaluations of his/her job satisfaction (JSAT) (Guenzi *et al.* 2019) 5-point scale, "1=Completely Disagree and 5=Completely Agree"
Customer acquisition effectiveness (CAE) (adapted from Jolson 2017) 7-point scale, "1=strongly disagree and 7= strongly agree"
Customer retention effectiveness (CRE) (adapted from Crosby *et al.* 2017 - relational selling behaviour) 7-point scale, "1=strongly disagree and 7= strongly agree" - Interaction intensity

Career Stage 1 (CS1) (Perrone *et al.* 2003) 5-point scale, "1=no concern and 5=great concern"
Career Stage 2 (CS2) (Flaherty and Pappas 2002b) Self-Selection Measure

Source: own elaborations

In the formulation of the hypotheses, the literature on ambidexterity suggests assessing the relationships with the outcome variables (performance and job satisfaction), adding the antecedent variables (orientations) and their influence on ambidexterity, through the various phases of the career stage, in an exploratory logic suggested by the PLS-SEM approach (Chin *et al.* 2012; Hair *et al.* 2012; Hair *et al.* 2017).

Hypotheses development

With regard to the antecedents, the literature had suggested, and study 1 results highlight, it seems that an open, proactive attitude and continuous self-improvement, but also the strong competitiveness and will to produce results, can be present in subjects careful to balance their efforts in ambidextrous activity. Similarly, it seems that providing customer attention and focusing on their needs in the short and long term, helps to balance the efforts and attention of the salesperson in an ambidextrous way, therefore:

H1a there is a positive link between customer orientation and ambidexterity

H1b there is a positive link between goal orientations and ambidexterity

Indeed, previous research suggests there are positive links between the preference and the balance of hunting and farming activities, therefore ambidexterity, and performance (Vieira *et al.* 2019) and that also job satisfaction (Affum-Osei *et al.* 2020). With regard to this latter aspect, the literature had in fact highlighted that career adaptability could help employees to sustain their effort to achieve high performance by engaging in several activities at the same time (Savickas 2002). Affum-Osei *et al.* (2020) underline that future forecasting skills are linked to better exploration and exploitation skills and, at the same time, that high levels of career concern could instead lead to being less likely to commit to compromises. Furthermore, the exploratory study highlights in some subjects the preference for hunting activities even in career stages in which an ambidextrous approach prevailed, therefore:

H2a there is a positive link between ambidexterity and performance

H2b there is a positive link between ambidexterity and job satisfaction

Additional effort was put to understand further the role of building performance through Customer acquisition effectiveness (CAE) and Customer retention effectiveness (CRE), proposing that both contribute in a balanced way to financial performance.

H3a CAE mediates the relation with ambidexterity and performance

H3b CRE mediates the relation with ambidexterity and performance

Finally, various previous works hinted that the gaze on one's own career and objectives interacted with the dimension of priorities and allocations of resources even in work. Research evidence suggests that career concern is associated with a number of beneficial outcomes. Given that concern involves the transition through the past, present, and anticipated future career (Savickas 2005), it predisposes the individual to simultaneously exploit and explore toward the pursuit of career goals (Jasmand *et al.* 2012). These configurations were explored in the qualitative study which hinted at some possible interrelations, which could have their own *rasion d'etre* in the moderation of the career stage in the relationship between ambidexterity and outcome variables.

H4 career stage moderates the relationship between ambidexterity and outcomes

Data collection: strategy and implementation

The questionnaire was created in April 2020 and has immediately undergone a first test for comprehension and fluency with a pilot-interviewee. The linguistic adaptation of the items in data collection and analysis was ensured by the researcher's experience (Italian native speaker) and according to Brislin's (1990) back-translation method by a different translator to ensure both versions reflect the same content and meaning.

The data was collected via e-mail survey (CAWI and MAWI), distributed through the contacts of a large Italian trade association (FNAARC), which represents more than 50k salespeople and sales agents throughout Italy. Data collection was undergone through Webropol in May-June 2020, reaching N=199 responses.

Data analysis

Data was processed and analysed with IBM SPSS for preliminary and correlation analysis, and Smart PLS 3.0 for PLS SEM, following the literature on the estimation of structural models with medium sized samples (Chin *et al.* 2012; Hair *et al.* 2012; Hair *et al.* 2017).

Chapter IV - Empirical research

Introduction: data collection and analysis

This chapter collects the research objectives emerging from the literature and implements them in an integrated research design, exploring and studying the phenomenon under investigation.

In particular, the first study follows a qualitative approach with a deep interview that aims to explore the orientations and behaviors of the sellers in relation to Sales Ambidexterity such as hunting and farming, with particular attention to the Career Stage framework and allowing relevant themes and contents to emerge. In the second study, dimensions and concepts emerged in the first study are incorporated in a questionnaire which allowed data collection and analysis, hypotheses development and testing, following the PLS SEM methods.

Study one: The deep interview

Research objectives and purposes

This work includes a qualitative research phase with exploratory purposes. In fact, all the frameworks mentioned previously had solid foundations and a strong current focus, however it was useful to carry out a first analysis of the salespeople's experiences and perceptions, to take a first look at the possible interrelationships, going to make some initial considerations for the further development of the theoretical framework, but also to probe the possible relevance of issues not yet emerged. The objectives of this first study are therefore:

- Apply a preliminary analysis to the various facets of sales ambidexterity as hunting and farming, with a qualitative approach that would allow further and deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation, trying to enrich the existing and relevant literature on the topic which is essentially quantitative, and to allow the spontaneous emergence of themes by research subjects
- Observe in a preliminary way how the concepts of sales ambidexterity and career stage interacted with each other, especially in consideration of the orientations and foci mentioned

– Receive some stimuli on the explored issues and on the personal and organizational aspects, on the basis of the grounded theory approach, on the issues raised.

Sample and descriptive results

The interviewees were conducted in October-November 2019. Initially the sample comprised of 10 salespeople based on direct contacts or via social media (LinkedIn), and using further snowballing techniques in interviews to gain access to one additional relevant informant, totalling 11 Italian salespeople for the final sample. The subjects interviewed are all operating in BtoB contexts. The interviewees were carefully selected to reach the greatest possible variability in terms of career stage, experience, type of roles (salespeople, sales agents, area managers and sales managers) and sectors, including ICT, pharmaceuticals, technical materials, fashion and others. The sample characteristics are summarised in table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Sample features

	Name	Age	Job	Industry	Years of sales experience
1	Claudio	37	Account Manager	ICT	13
2	Nicola	60	Account Manager	Food	27
3	Carmen	43	Sales agent	Automotive/beauty	8
4	Matteo	32	Sales agent	Beauty	8
5	Elio	48	Sales agent	Automotive	20
6	Davide	28	Sales agent	Pharma	5
7	Fabio	29	Pre-sales specialist	ICT	3
8	Francesco	36	Account Manager	Technical supply	10
9	Oliviero	64	Sales manager and CEO	Fashion	40
10	Marcello	52	Sales agent	Technical supply	30
11	Gianluca	50	Sales manager	Ict	25

Source: own elaborations

The maximum variation criterion (Patton 2002) ensured heterogeneity within the sample, in order to represent the vast sales practice scenario across industries and ages, as well as different job tenure among the salespeople included. This sample selection criterion ensured information saturation on a variety of topics of interests, as well as allowing the spontaneous emergence of other topics.

Results

An analysis of the profiles reveals an experience ranging from 3 to 40 years in the sales sector, with an average of 17, which results in the belonging of the subjects to the four classes of the Career Stage framework. In particular, the four subjects under exploration (3, 4, 6, 7) include three young salespeople who have carried out the profession for a few years and started from scratch, sometimes even developing areas where their respective companies did not previously operate, including only woman in the sample, who is older than the others in the same group but has recently changed sector. All these subjects recall very common issues of the exploration phase, such as the need to make themselves known both by the customers and by the company with which they work, discover the environment and be noticed. Moreover, these subjects seem very projected towards the future, even in relations with customers, but often they have mainly developed the business as hunters.

> *3: everything is new for me because I have to go and introduce myself to customers that were not my company's customers, I am getting them myself, (...) in these months it works like this, go there, introduce yourself, the "flab" will come later. You have to sow, I'm sowing now.*

4: The company asked to open a market in the Marche region and then create a sales network and to further maintain and develop. (...) I try not to sell only the products to the customer, I try to build something with him, in 5-6 years from now, get further ahead in terms of her satisfaction, his customers, his turnover, my turnover.

6: Our job is based on building trust with your customers, trying to gain their trust and then as you start, go around, take doors in the face, as you break down the wall of initial distrust that you have towards all people, physiological, and in fact as you gain confidence, trust and reliability ... (...) And when I say at the beginning I mean the first 3-4 years, generally, this hoarding of trust you really have after the 5 years of work, hard work, then you really start to hold the customer in hand, as they say.

7: I have not "become" anything for now, but let's say how I entered Alpha. I joined Alpha sending the curriculum because I was looking for a company that would host me for an internship abroad. (...) When I came back, they gave me the interview and they took me. Then in these 3 and a half years things have

evolved and will probably also evolve in a fairly important way from here to very little time.

All subjects show a dynamic and proactive style, but also very competitive and performance orientation.

6: over time I probably also got competitive. The competitive spirit of the results is certainly a main driving force and the fact of seeing that you succeed, so that you can be among those who can have their say, among those who can put themselves in emphasis, it means that of course you are always in competition with the best in the end within the company, and this creates competitive spirit, creates competitive spirit of results. The companies, on the other hand, feed themselves of this, of our internal competition, is that that drives us salespeople to show us, to do more, to demonstrate more, to demonstrate that one is better than the other ...

7: on my gut, I'm telling you that I point more at the results. (...) Then clearly if you don't get the results you have to learn things better.

As regards the Establishment phase (1, 8) the interviewees also highlight specific moments in their career development, which often also coincide with changes in the type of contract and role. Both initially developed business in the early part of their career, even as freelance. Now they want to demonstrate what they are worth, but within the path they feel they have created: the first has gone from hunter to specialist with a new type of contract, so he works ambidextrously by himself or with the team, but sometimes he misses hunting. The second, instead, became an area manager and manages his area and sales team with dedication. In both cases the goal orientations seem strongly anchored to the attention to personal evolution, but in the first one also in the conquered tranquillity, a pressure that is present but that does not represent a source of anxiety and stress, and therefore a contrast to the performance avoidance, which is seen as a conquest.

> *1: before I had a freelance contract, when I started, then slowly I became an employee. Now let's say I follow certain situations (customers) while I pass others to someone else. Another difference is the fact that I'm less around. (...) Let's be clear, at the beginning I took the car and drove to the customer for literally any little issue... now I think it is better to analyse and rationalize*

earlier, maybe it's better to spend 10 minutes more in the office than to go on a journey without a load.

8: I've worked for a company for almost 11 years, then I changed company. I made a wrong choice changing company, because given my young age, from the need to grow professionally, I accepted a very interesting proposal from a company that then proved to be anything but interesting. (...) Then fortunately in 2014 I found this position.

The subjects in the Maintenance phase (2, 5, 10) are subjects who have settled in their work situation for some time and have also shared some anecdotes of how the profession has evolved over the decades.

The case of 2 was classified in the Maintenance stage because, despite the mature age, demonstrates to be in insatiable and in constant evolution, with a great desire to do and a projection towards the future. He shows great attention and consciousness to the existence and management of contrasts: from the small customer to the multinational, from the sales role to that of coordinator at the same time, showing an ambidextrous inclination on many fronts, including that between hunting and farming. This attention to sales ambidexterity is highlighted not only for himself, in his job, but also for the

team, with a great proactivity and leadership. In particular, this subject still demonstrates the passion for work and conquest, but without aggression, with a balanced perception of work and success based on well-being.

Interviewee 5 has always remained roughly in the same sector and has highlighted the experience, which helps to do one's job well, but also the growing competitive pressure and difficulty in the job. He declares to be ambidextrous in sales, but also says that it depends on the type of company: in the previous one, it focused much more on keeping customers, given the type of exclusive contract. Finally, interviewee 10 is a salesperson who is also very attentive to the sales ambidexterity, dynamic and attentive to evolving continuously, but also highlights that goal are challenging when they can be reached.

> *2: The salary is the grave. I mean you take it anyways... for me the salesperson must be incentivized by the commission, by something extra, that more I work – the more I earn. This week I often got up at 5-6 to finish in the evening at 8-9, but I still do it, at an almost retirement age. But I have something that materially returns to me, apart from satisfaction.*

> *5: With experience and improving your work, it certainly takes less time to obtain the same results, you can better understand the client's psychology and*

the result is certainly obtained with less effort. Let's say that in this sector, but I believe a little in general, this job has changed a lot. The work has got worse, in the sense that it is becoming more and more difficult, because the competition is ever greater, it is becoming more and more difficult to obtain the same results, but thanks to the experience maybe you can do it as well.

10: The way you approach the market changes, from a personal point of view not from the condition of the market, it is no longer an approach that I knew when I started this job. The 50-year-old representative was the one who had a structure that worked for him, sat behind the desk and had to manage employees only. Today, however, presence on the market is absolutely required (...). So, this type of work has become absolutely more demanding, not for a personal approach but because the conditions have changed.

In Disengagement stage (9, 11) there are mature professionals from the point of view of age and professional experience, with very different approaches. Their personal intention is certainly to enjoy the last years of a job with which they are immensely in love. Subject 9 seems to reflect a distrust for himself and his sector, although the personal contacts created over the years are active, which makes him a farmer. 11

instead created a new business starting from a previous experience in ICT, he often repeats the term and the theme of relationships, so much so that he built the current business exclusively with the contacts of the previous experience in a large ICT group.

> *9: I made my children abandon (my business), because it was not really a thing to stay in this sector (...). And so, I'm still there because I want, because I still have fun, because I still do important things and I have surrounded myself with important contacts, so I have relationships with the most interesting subjects in the fashion apparel sector.*

> *11: It is a continuous growth, a continuous experience and, in any case, it is not only experience, but you must also apply yourself on what it is. I feel like saying a little bit of psychology, a little bit of philosophy always helps. (...) (Compared to the past) there was certainly a different quantity and aggressiveness. Today there is more quality and perhaps a little less aggression.*

Table 4.2 summarises the findings emerged under the categories of orientations, ambidexterity and career stage, presented in detail in the following sections.

Table 4.2. Summary of results

	Age	*Career stage*	*Ambidexterity*	*Goal orientation*	*Regulatory mode*
1	37	Establishment	Used to be a business developer, as an activity he is quite ambidextrous and managerial, but still enjoys hunting a lot	High learning orientation, high performance avoidance orientation (the pressure and anxiety of the previous role, together with the new sense of responsibility)	The new position / role allows him less pressure and to have an economic serenity, less pressure, but a greater involvement and sense of responsibility
2	60	Maintenance	Strong awareness of the importance of ambidexterity both for himself and for the team he manages	He evolves and studies a lot, reaching new goals is his oxygen, high learning and performance orientation	High locomotion, evaluation through objective achievement and success
3	43	Exploration	Hunter because she has just changed job, after long experience as a farmer in another sector	Evolving, open and studying, but ultimately also earning has a priority: values money, trust and reputation	Wants to improve, prove she is doing well and earn: high locomotion and assessment
4	32	Exploration	Hunter, he is opening the market in the region, but has a long-term perspective and collaboration (win win) with the customer	Reads and evolves a lot, enthusiastic about the job, but also enjoy life	/
5	48	Maintenance	Ambidexterity is important, in contexts with exclusive contracts it is more about farming, generally both (H-F) are needed	Improving goes hand in hand with achieving one's goals, perceived great performance avoidance and pressure	/
6	28	Exploration	Spontaneously cites 50-50, performance is measured by the company on turnover and new customers	Much learning, he has also started university again with enthusiasm, competition excites him	High locomotion and assessment
7	29	Exploration	H-F balance but enjoys hunting a lot, sees it as a personal goal, even if farming is fundamental for growing	Performance oriented	Dynamic and ambitious. Proactive, but also attentive to results and to shine compared to others
8	36	Establishment	Area manager but tries to push, the culture of “respect”, farmers but pushes for balance	Studies and evolves, realistic with respect to performance claims	/

9	64	Disengagement	Long term customers, farmer with a strong qualified network	/	/
10	52	Maintenance	Ambidextrous, always open eyes. The long term customer often indicate and help identifying the new customers on the market	He puts himself into discussion every day: learning is key, the objectives are challenging if plausible	Prevalence of locomotion, awareness of the assessment
11	50	Disengagement	Farmer, cold calling still amuses him, the relationship as a strategy is something he acquired and considers precious	Learning orientation and performance orientation, satisfaction but also continuous pressure	Assessment especially by customers and peers

Source: own elaborations

Sales Ambidexterity: Hunting and farming

With respect to ambidexterity, as already mentioned, almost all the interviewees proved to be balanced or aware of the importance of the balance of their activities and attention towards new customers and already acquired customers, especially this is implemented by the subjects in establishment and maintenance. In the case of 5, he emphasizes a difference compared to the company with which he previously worked, so that the type of contract (exclusive for the customer) made farming a priority over balance. For the rest, regardless of the sectors but not the years of experience, there seems to be great awareness of the need for a balanced approach and time planning between hunting and farming.

1: When I entered the company, it was expanding greatly, I developed the (Italian) east coast area, while this was a strong company in Lombardy and Tuscany above all. Now let's say that if a new customer calls, I pass it to someone else or I start the discussion and then pass them, it depends.

2: The acquisition of customers is fundamental, consider on 100 customers you have, surely during the year you lose 5-10 of them, there is a percentage that (you lose) anyway ... So, you always have to grow.

4: I try to spend almost the same time (with acquired and new customers). For instance, I contact or visit new customers from 9 to 3 and then from 3 to 7.30 I go to see the established customers. Or on a daily basis, maybe one day I only make new customers and another only acquired customers. (...) These two things must go hand in hand, even if one day I will have 100 customers and everyone buys a lot, every month, if I stop making new customers this thing sooner or later leads to death. It is like gasoline: new customers are essential for the engine.

5: The care of the acquired customer is very important because it is the basis, acquiring customers is not enough because naturally some get lost every now

and then, for various reasons, therefore it is necessary to go and find other customers (...). With the company I used to work with, it was different: we had a more exclusive product, therefore customer care was more important than going to look for new customers, instead in this case with this company it is very important to take care of both aspects.

10: The two things cannot be separated: one must leave the seed and not try to plough dead fields. (...) So, optimizing time means knowing how to manage the customers you have without this representing a waste of time or a use of more time than is necessary and to constantly carve out a chance to search the market for new outlets. (...) If I have had the same customers for 30 years, it means that I must have missed some. (...) These aspects (current customers and prospects) are so intertwined because, when you are on field, sometimes it is your long term customer who gives you the cue on who may be worth knowing.

The subjects in exploration, the youngest, despite being very aware of the ambidexterity issue, are mainly dedicated to developing new territories or new areas due to company requests, therefore beyond their awareness, they often carry out a lot of hunting activities compared to farming, but in the long-term perspective.

3: It's all new for me because I have to go and introduce myself to customers that I wasn't passed by the company, that I am getting myself. I expected to make a good percentage of already acquired customers, who, at least, knew the group, many instead do not know us at all, so I have to stand there and introduce myself... Which is not a problem, but obviously everything is new. Of course, it would have been better to have a customer portfolio to work on, not create them myself, (...) the flab will come later.

4: The company asked to open a market in Marche and then create a sales network to be able to maintain it. (...) I try not only to sell the products to the customer, but I try to build something with them. In 5-6 years starting from here, I want to get further ahead in terms of her satisfaction, their customers, their turnover, my turnover. (...) In my opinion, maybe it's better to sell a little less, but grow both.

6: Half of the work is to follow established customers, because they are a real ... the value, that is, the reality we live in today. Because they provide the "certainty", not the future. So surely half of the time should be dedicated to what you have, many customers who really matter, while the other half of the

time you spend trying to acquire new customers that you hope will prove to be as important as those.

7: I'm particularly intrigued by acquiring the customer, then I want to retain him and "take him home" as soon as possible. But I'm also stimulated by the current customers because first I know I can make him an up-selling, second I like to pamper him. (...) Consider that (acquiring) the new customer is exciting, closing the deal is very thrilling, even if my salary is not related to the turnover or anything, it is a personal satisfaction because the customer believed in you, in your product, you sold it well and therefore the customer likes to bring it. Let's say I do 60% new customers and 40% consolidated ones.

Two subjects, in particular, spontaneously cited a great passion for cold-calling and hunting activities in general, although 1 is now in the establishment phase, but at the beginning of his career he was mainly hunting, while 11, in the disengagement phase, manages his business almost completely building on already consolidated contacts, even in previous business experiences.

1: Approaching the customer is still something that I really like. I try to imagine the customer, I go to LinkedIn and Facebook to see even if he has some passion, some details also to talk, in short, to look for an engagement element.

11: I still love cold-calling, which is something that in the company where I work is somehow considered a bit particular, a bit old fashioned as a commercial approach. But it still is challenging, although it is increasingly difficult, because we are bombarded with telemarketing. However, that's something I want to keep. I dedicate it one day a week, the rest is certainly the management of ongoing negotiations, rather than selling new solutions to the small customer base.

Instead for 9, farmer in disengagement, although he declares attention to new and current customers, it seems however that the activities have been moving for years on stable and well-established relationships.

9: I've never stopped, I've always done research, I've always moved. (...) When you went to a certain city, is completely different today, my product was sold by 5 or 6 customers. I knew those 5 or 6 customers, the other ones maybe were served by my antagonist... and therefore I already had an understanding of my

surrounding area. Then, for instance, a jeans shop could upgrade and become a boutique, and therefore they would call me because they might need to insert jackets, shirts and so on in the mix.

Learning and performance orientation

For many interviewees, there is enthusiasm and a preference for personal development and therefore the achievement of self-improvement as a goal.

3: I am always happy to learn new things, always challenge myself, question myself. Lately sometimes it's a bit demanding, but I'm not a girl anymore (...) in my opinion it is not enough to say "ok I have reached this, I am 43 years, having many experiences," (...) I believe that we must always aspire to the best, always improve.

6: My work inspired me. When I first enrolled at university some years ago I had my time on nonsense books... it was a pointless waste of time, so I did the opposite, I found a job that I liked it and then I started studying again after 5 years of work.

10: This job is very dynamic and "iridescent", it requires us to put ourselves into discussion every day. I don't want it to sound like a cliché because it is reality. What was true yesterday is no longer true today, so you must always have a fresh and market-oriented mind. You must always have the ability not to sit on what you have done, because it is not the goals you have scored that count, but the goals you have to go for. So there are no more champions who can always be on the pitch, there are people who have to demonstrate what they're worth every day. I think it is motivating because (…) you are perpetually stimulated, you chase the numbers but pursue your ability to know how to do them.

Other interviewees also emphasize the adrenaline aspect of the performance goals achieved, which corresponds to young subjects with a prevalence of hunting, with a search for recognition by customers, and peers.

6: Over time, I think I have grown competitive. The competitive spirit of the results is a main driving force and the fact that you see yourself achieving results and being among those who can have their say, it means that you are always in competition with the best salespeople within the company: I think this

creates competition, competitive results, and that companies feed themselves with it (our internal competition), it is what pushes us salespeople to do more, demonstrate more, prove that one is better than the other.

7: By instinct I'd say I'm more results oriented, because when you get the results you convince yourself that you know things, first you can learn them but then if you don't get the results you say "I'm doing something wrong". Then clearly if you don't get the results you have to learn things better. But consider that we work with a lot of training on the job, so you learn things on the job.

Finally, there is a group of interviewees that seem to tie the two dimensions together, as if one were a consequence of the other: improving leads to better results or, vice versa, if poor results have been obtained, maybe something needs to be improved.

2: The more my agent is good and the more I earn, this is an inevitable axiom: I train you, you sell me more and you perform more. Obviously, we don't do it for solidarity, we're not a charity, it is always to develop the business more.

4: If you evolve and enrich, you always commit to something better and in the end. By committing yourself, you reach the goal and you don't even realize it.

(...) You don't have to focus on the goal, because otherwise you get dumb, you get stressed and you don't sell ... then instead of thinking about the goal, you focus on how to improve yourself and your business every day, at the end of the month you have reached your budget and you have not even thought about it.

5: In my opinion they (evolving and achieving results) go hand in hand, because the objectives' achievement is linked to improvement and to always learning new things.

11: I'm never content, once I reach the goal, I always think about the next one (...) in my opinion these aspects go together. That is, the achievement of goals also gives you the serenity to make a personal growth. When you are unable to reach your goals, you have less time to dedicate to personal growth.

Self-regulatory mode

As per the Self-regulatory mode, particular attention was put to explore how the interviewees perceive their assessment, as well as and the level of perceived pressure, to get more information on their focus for proactivity (locomotion orientation) or for the awareness of being evaluated (assessment orientation). In general, there is a certain

attention and pressure on the results of salespeople, certainly the type of contracts makes the difference, but also the sense and reachability of the objectives. Together with contextual and organizational factors, however, there is above all a relevance of the psychological and personal motivational aspects that make one or the other focus more relevant.

> *1: The first years, I tell you the truth, it was a nightmare, because it never came (reaching the budget). It's been 2-3 years now that around February-March the deal arrives, I catch the "Moby Dick" of the situation, which lets me work relatively free for the rest of the year.*

> *5: The results are judged by comparison with the previous years. Then, being my employer a small, almost a family business, there is a direct relationship with the entrepreneur, which is able to evaluate the work done (...) I live it as a form of pressure, let's say that part of the sales representative work, the company certainly puts pressure to make the salesperson reach the objectives and this is what the sales rep feels, especially in larger and more structured firms that I know.*

10: Companies recently tend to decrease the commission and increase the rewards on the objectives. These increasingly complex, articulated rewards programs embrace several aspects of the type of turnover. (...) I live these aspects carefully: obviously it is stimulating when goals are agreed, whereas it is stressful when goals are not reasonably designed at the beginning of the year and therefore become unattainable, so they (...) provoke disinterest.

Sales technology and ambidexterity

In some cases, the topic of technology has emerged, which is perceived by salespeople as something that can help them in their profession, to better organize the collection and systematization of data, to present themselves with a higher level of professionalism. There is also a distinction of use in the stages of the sales process, between hunting and farming. It seems that the phases before and after the sale involve technology to some extent, while the phase of sales closing is often left tech free by choice, choosing to focus on relationship, trust, product value and experience, even in BtoB sectors.

3: I think I sell a complex product, so we present it carefully, then we make appointments, set the date and show how the machinery works, that is very important ... in those phases there is honestly little use of technology.

6: There are elements of my work that I believe are greatly helped by technology. Imagine the CRM, now it is true that it takes some time, but it gives you updated and timely reporting on customers, in short, at the end of the year you have a precise idea of what has been done, while once it used to be more approximative. As for the online catalogue, the tablet, these are all things that make you present in another way, I think they are elements that help the sale anyway ... if I have to fill out an order, I don't use it. That is, if I am with the customer and I have to do a series of reasonings I like to talk and maybe sketch on paper... it is guiding the customer, I think it is even more engaging for the customer. Let's say that I use technological tools, which maybe even lead you to sales, to keep in touch with customers, etc., but I usually manage the moment of direct interaction without it, for my own choice.

An ambivalent relationship with technology also emerges: there are those who perceive it as an enhancement of their activities, while others consider it a burden, an additional

commitment and not a value. Indeed, technology is sometimes seen as another threat to replace the figure of the salesperson. These attitudes do not seem linked to particular career stages, or years of experience or age, but rather to a personal predisposition and a mix of proactive, evolutionary orientations, the willingness to use the tools rather than undergo and passively receive them.

> *8: I personally do not believe in the CRM, because you already fight all day with retailers, with agencies… and to have to load the CRM in the evening is an overwhelming task for a person who already has such a stress, especially nowadays, where retailers want everything "today for yesterday". In short, it is already a stress and this of CRM is another stress that obviously adds up. So, the main problem is that before we worked much more quality, now not anymore.*

Discussion

The purpose of this preliminary exploratory qualitative study was to investigate whether and to what extent the dimensions of ambidexterity and career stage in BtoB salespeople could interact and have an impact on their performance and satisfaction, as well as the overall perception of the sale job. In addition, aspects of individual

orientations were explored to evaluate the possibility of deepening these links in further quantitative studies and if there were any emerging aspects. In all interviewed subjects, elements of ambidexterity and proactivity emerge, recalling that the work of selling has evolved a lot over the years and that in general salespeople need to reinvent themselves and be reactive every day based on the challenges of customers and competitors and the context in general (Jones 2005; Cuevas 2018).

The analysis reveals a correspondence between more or less spontaneous role definitions as hunters or farmers, particularly at the beginning and at the end of a career. In fact it seems, especially in the exploration (6,7) phase, that the salespeople mainly do hunting activities, while at the end of their career there are two classic examples of farming among the interviewees in the disengagement phase (9,11), allowed by a long career and many professional and personal relationships.

In many interviewees, the awareness of the need to organize and act ambidextrously is clear, also because in many sectors the customer bases appear relatively large and unstable. Consequently, salespeople have often, except for the figures in disengagement, expressed the awareness and need for a balance between hunting and farming. On the other hand, especially in the IT sector, there seems to be a

specialization of sales in hunting (1,6), since the after-sales phases are managed by assistance, therefore it could be said that hunting and farming orientations, as well as ambidexterity, also depend on contextual and sector-related factors (De Carlo and Lam 2016).

Going into more detail also about the orientations and foci, salespeople have often brought out desires and propensities for evolution and self-improvement but also a preference for adrenaline, competition and performance. In some cases, the stress related to work and assessment also emerges (1,5,8), but also a proactivity (locomotion orientation), represented by a high learning orientation, prevails in most cases (3,6,8).

This result finds support in previous research, since salespeople who hold a learning goal orientation are intrinsically motivated to complete a difficult task and generally characterized by a preference for challenging tasks, the acquisition of new skills and experiences (Kohli *et al.* 1998; Silver *et al.* 2006).

Moreover, the two goal orientations are often found to be present in many of the subjects, linking self-improvement (learning orientation) to the achievement of results (performance orientation). This aspect also conforms the idea suggested by Cron

(1984) according to which “learning will continue at a steady pace throughout a salesperson's career”.

It therefore seems that the strong general customer orientation and the prevalence of learning orientation is present the salespeople (accompanied by strong performance orientation especially in the profiles in the exploration phase that aim to create and establish themselves in their profession by demonstrating their achievements and results), that are not afraid to spend time on complex, lengthy and failure-prone activities such as hunting (De Carlo and Lam 2016). Moreover, in ambidextrous salespeople, this attitude of renewed and indomitable desire to achieve results and evolve, paired with a long-term perspective, in which they know that the results of hunting activities will then translate into long-term results, allow for an optimized time allocation and relationship with the customers, leading to superior performance over time (Vieira *et al.* 2019).

Many declare that they are very enthusiastic and proud of their work, while others also bring out aspects of personal life and indicate serenity as a form of success, rather than social recognition or the goals achieved. Finally, some bring out the aspect of technology, which in some cases is presented as a burden and a further complication

of their work (Tarafdar *et al.*, 2014; Cron 2017; Ogilvie *et al.* 2018), while in others a fundamental resource, to be implemented to further foster personal organization and sales performance. In short, a series of other personal and contextual, sector-related factors can contribute to either reticence or enthusiasm for sales technology (Marshall *et al.* 2012). Particularly, it is useful to underline that this enthusiasm for technology emerged not necessarily among the youngest individuals, but by the more dynamic ones, according to a logic of high bilateral goal orientation and high locomotion, across different career stages (2,3,6).

Limitations

Among the limitations of this study, the peculiarity of the sample should be included, as it is related with a certain geographical and cultural context, which is the Italian one.

Of course, the maximum variation criterion followed for the sampling procedure led to a diversification from the point of view of industries, age and experience, trying to bring out the differences in attitudes and personal orientations beyond these contingent factors. It could also be proposed, based on the results of the study, to keep in mind the specificities of sales roles in particular sectors, such as IT, in which the hunting and

farming attitude are present but do not have the same impact on activities since the follow-up is essentially technical and carried out by other figures.

Finally, a continuation of the investigations on the issues highlighted is suggested and proposed in the rest of the study, trying to establish the verification of hypotheses through quantitative methodologies.

Study two: The survey

Research objectives and purpose

This quantitative study aims to test and describe the relationships and impact of salespeople orientations and ambidexterity on key sales outcomes (sales performance and job satisfaction), with the addition the effect of customer acquisition and retention effectiveness, in interaction with career stages.

Starting from the findings of the qualitative study, in which the phenomenon had been explored, a quantitative study was then followed to investigate and verify what emerged previously, also on a quantitative basis. The results of the qualitative survey

highlighted the importance of all the dimension investigated in the study and helped refining the constructs under investigation. Particularly, the role of goal orientation not only as a learning and performance approach, but also as performance avoidance, which in fact was included thanks to the Silver *et al.* (2006)'s measures. This evolved and enriched goal orientation measure served to intercept the concerns and growing sense of responsibility of salespeople through their career evolution. However, in the measurement assessment analysis, as presented in the results' paragraph, this third dimension did not result significant and was therefore removed from the final model. Furthermore, the qualitative research has provided an essential in-depth analysis in the interpretation of the results, since the various roles and industrial sectors bring with them specifications also of role division in the pre and post sales phases, which have been taken into consideration.

Particular attention is therefore paid in this study to the verification of hypotheses on:

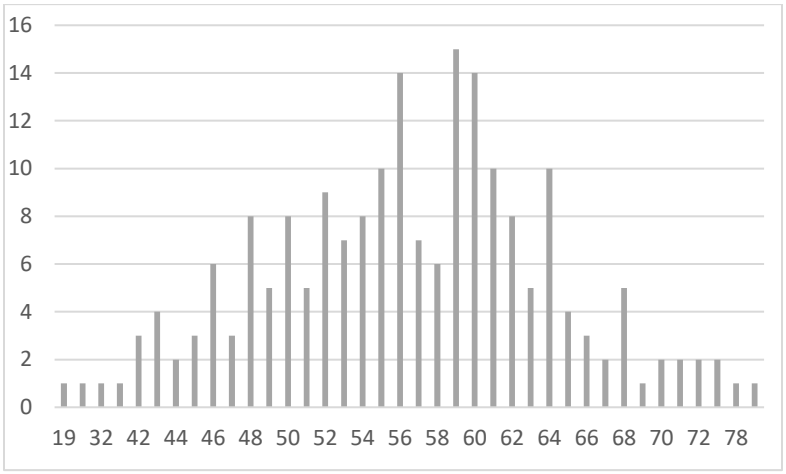
- Salespeople's orientations and ambidexterity
- Sales ambidexterity as hunting and farming and sales outcomes
- The moderation effect of career stage.

Sample characteristics

The sample comprised of N=199 BtoB salespeople and sales agents across Italy, as the questionnaire was distributed thanks to the collaboration of the FNAARC association, which represents more than 50k salespeople and sales agents throughout Italy.

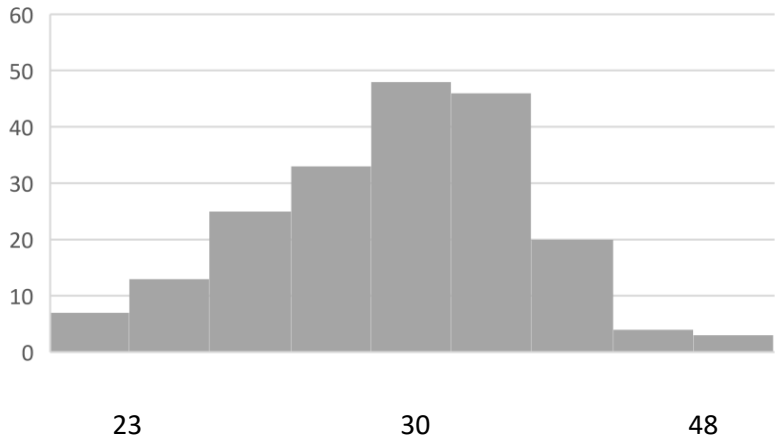
The gender the distribution within the samples is M=96% F=4%, while the age range is 19-78, average=56. Particularly important in this study is the age and the sales experience, which before the development of the career stage paradigm were the most used variables to describe the expectations and priorities of individuals on their career. As visible in the figures below, which report the distribution of the sales experience and the subdivision into quartiles, the sales experience also varies considerably but essentially, like age, it seems to report above all high values, so the sample essentially refers to salespeople sales professionals of fairly high age and experience (figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). This is further evidenced by the representation of the distribution in career stages, according to the self-selection measure purposed by Flaherty and Pappas (2002) (see figure 4.4), for which most of the subjects in the sample feel that they are in a mintenance phase. Subsequent analyses will clarify the link between personal variables on orientations, behaviours and the link with outcome measures through the career stages.

Figure 4.1. Age range



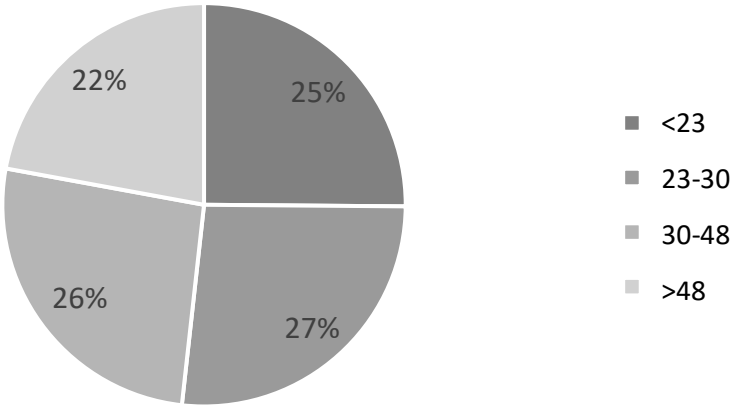
Source: own elaborations

Figure 4.2. Years of sales experience



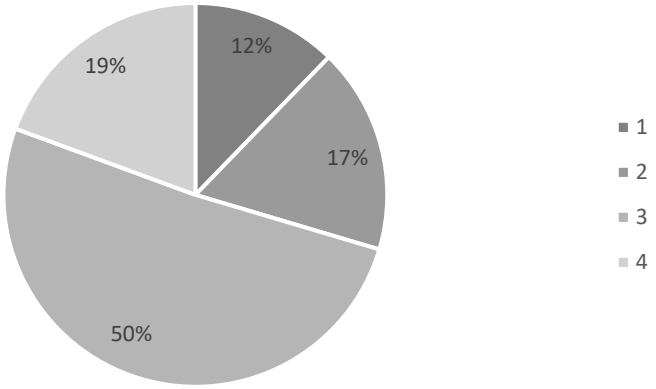
Source: own elaborations

Figure 4.3. Years of sales experience divided per classes (quartiles)



Source: own elaborations

Figure 4.4. Career stage self-selection measure (Flaherty and Pappas 2002)



Source: own elaborations

With respect to the geographical distribution, most of the respondents live and work in the northern Italy (55%), which is the richest and most developed area from an economic, industrial and commercial point of view, whereas the others live in the central (21%) and southern (23%) regions. With respect to the roles of the survey interviewees, they were mainly salespeople and sales representatives (87%), as well as area managers (3%) and sales managers (6%) or other (4%).

As per the industries, coded following the ATECO businesses classification, according to the classification of the Italian statistical institute (ISTAT), which takes up the standardization of sector classifications at European level, there is heterogeneity in the sectors to which the salespeople involved belong, in particular from industries connected to manufacturing (25%) trade (16%), building and construction (9%) with an important representation of the strategic businesses for the Italian economy: mechanical and technical automation, fashion, food and wine and furniture sectors (32%).

Results

Measurement model

To conduct the data analysis and processing, Smart PLS (Version 3.0) to obtain partial least squares (PLS) estimates for the structural parameters of the model. PLS was used for three reasons, following Panagopulos *et al.* (2020): first, PLS is ideal when estimating complex models with medium-sized samples and is preferred for testing interactions because it does not inflate measurement error (Chin *et al.* 2012) and is particularly indicated for smaller sample sizes (Hair *et al.* 2017); second, PLS offers higher accuracy in the estimation of structural model parameters when compared to factor-based SEM (Hair *et al.* 2017); third, PLS better suits the complex model of the study (Hair *et al.* 2011).

First of all, the measurement model was verified by checking that all the parameters indicated by Hair *et al.* (2011) were respected. The following tables summarize the results on the parameters to be respected for measurement model assessment, particularly: outer loadings thresholds, constructs' reliability and validity (Chrombach's Alpha, AVE), discriminant validity (Fornell Larker) and collinearity (VIF).

In particular, as reported in table 4.3, following Hair et al. (2011) indications, the internal consistency reliability criterion is satisfied, since composite reliability is higher than .70 for all the constructs considered. The values of the Chrombach's Alpha are all higher than .70, except in the case of LO, which is very close to the threshold value and therefore considered acceptable. As for the Indicator reliability, according to which the Indicator loadings should be higher than .70, the condition is satisfied. Furthermore, it has been verified that the indicator's loadings are higher than all of its cross loadings. The convergent validity of the measurement model is also satisfied, since the average variance extracted (AVE) is higher than .50. As reported in table 4.4, the discriminant validity is satisfied since the Fornell – Larcker criterion, according to which the highest square AVE score should correspond to the reference construct, is respected. Finally, the collinearity test represented by the VIF shows that all items have scores below 5, thus all the selected items pass the test.

Table 4.3. Measurement model characteristics

	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	RHO_A	COMPOSITE RELIABILITY	AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED (AVE)
CAE	0.87	0.87	0.92	0.79
CO	0.77	0.81	0.87	0.69
CRE	0.79	0.81	0.87	0.70
CS1	0.92	0.87	0.92	0.49
RO	0.87	0.90	0.92	0.80
AO	0.80	0.80	0.88	0.71
JSAT	0.90	0.95	0.92	0.70
LO	0.68	0.68	0.82	0.60
PAP	0.91	0.93	0.95	0.85
PERF	0.90	0.90	0.94	0.83

Source: own elaborations

Table 4.4. Fornell-Larker test for discriminant validity

	AMBIDEX	CAE	CO	CRE	CS1	RO	AO	JSAT	LO	PAP	PERF
AMBIDEX											
CAE	0.42	0.89									
CO	0.43	0.26	0.83								
CRE	0.35	0.45	0.37	0.83							
CS1	0.31	0.18	0.11	0.08	0.70						
RO	0.43	0.03	0.30	0.24	0.12	0.89					
AO	0.95	0.45	0.35	0.29	0.32	0.16	0.85				
JSAT	0.32	0.38	0.31	0.40	-0.09	0.17	0.27	0.83			
LO	0.54	0.22	0.41	0.26	0.17	0.29	0.50	0.25	0.78		
PAP	0.27	0.15	0.17	0.07	0.15	0.26	0.22	0.13	0.32	0.92	
PERF	0.20	0.31	0.20	0.29	-0.01	0.15	0.15	0.4	0.07	0.11	0.91

Source: own elaborations

Table 4.5. VIF measure for collinearity

	VIF
AO2	1.6
AO2	1.67
AO3	1.72
AO3	1.74
AO4	1.97

AO4	2
CAE1	1.84
CAE4	2.79
CAE5	2.67
CO1	1.29
CO3	2.09
CO4	2.26
CRE2	1.76
CRE3	1.60
CRE4	1.60
CS1	3.42
CS10	2.77
CS11	1.98
CS12	2.27
CS2	4.13
CS3	2.77
CS4	2.50
CS5	2.83
CS6	2.87
CS7	2.37
CS8	3.42
CS9	4.66
JSAT1	3.03
JSAT2	2.87
JSAT3	2.01

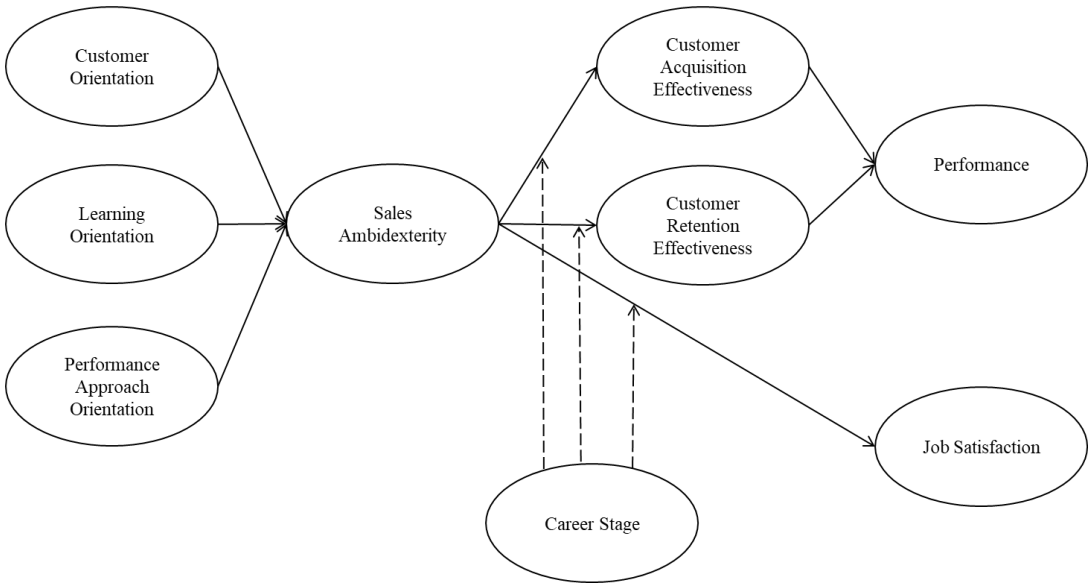
JSAT4	2.63
JSAT5	2.61
LO1	1.30
LO3	1.28
LO4	1.44
PAPO1	2.88
PAPO3	4.99
PAPO4	3.35
PERF1	3.04
PERF2	4.14
PERF3	2.35
RO1	2.22
RO1	2.34
RO3	2.74
RO3	2.84
RO4	2.25
RO4	2.27

Source: own elaborations

All the constructs have essentially passed the psychometric properties checks, except PAV, which must therefore be dropped, as well as two items of JSAT, in such a way as to have all constructs with the same number of items, to have a more stable model

as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2011). The definitive model is illustrated in figure 4.5 and furtherly analysed.

Figure 4.5. Theoretical model



Source: own elaborations

Structural model

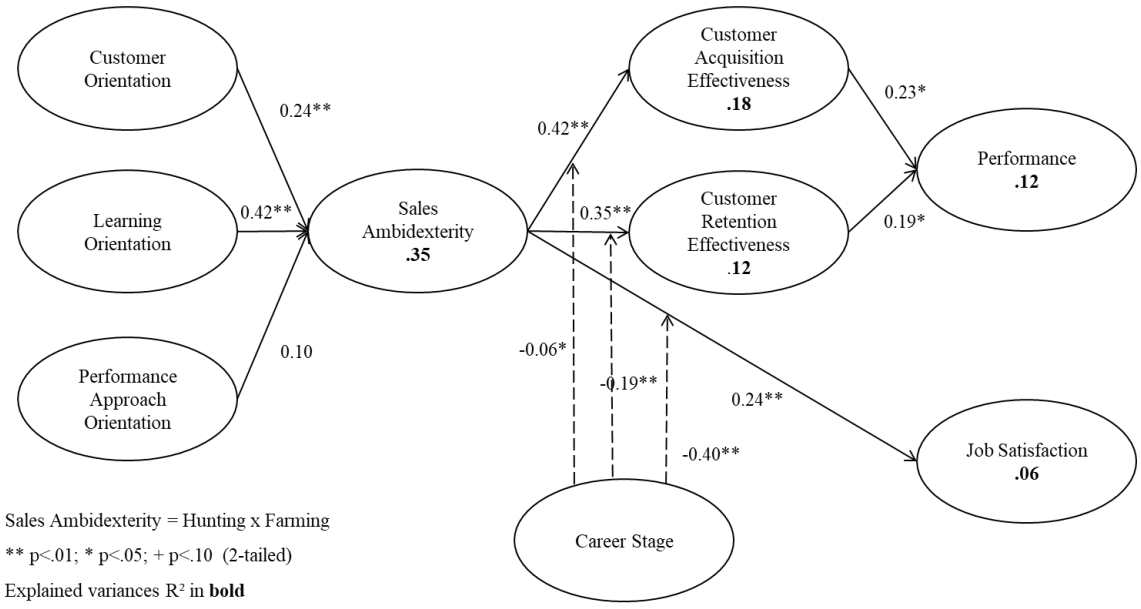
The evaluation of the complex structural model followed the indications of the previous literature on the creation of relationships and above all in the creation of the

ambidexterity construct, through a two-step procedure proposed by Panagopulos *et al.* (2020) which allowed to propose Ambidexterity as Hunting X Farming.

Figure 4.6 and 4.7 show the results of the path coefficients and the results of the subsequent bootstrapping to verify the significance of the relationships between the variables under examination (Hair *et al.* 2011, 2017).

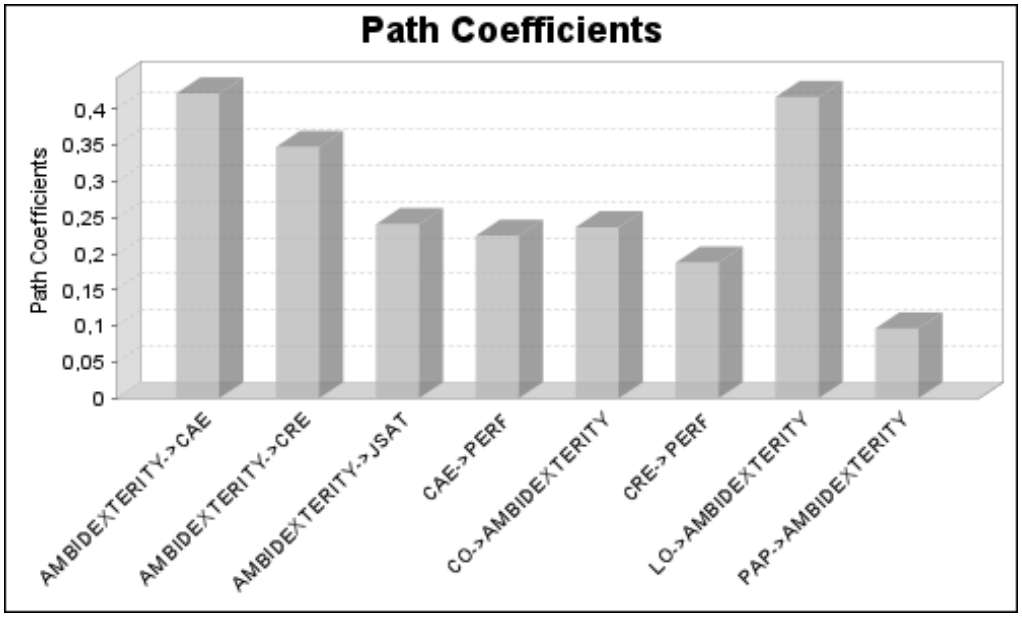
The relationships of the antecedents CO and LO are both positive and significant with respect to Ambidexterity, while PAP is not significant. From the point of view of outcomes, the ambidexterity relationship with CAE and CRE is positive and significant, in the mediation of the relationship with PERF. Finally, the same relationship with JSAT results positive and significant. The linear relationships will be illustrated in detail later in the hypothesis testing paragraph.

Figure 4.6. SEM PLS results



Source: own elaborations

Figure 4.7. SEM PLS algorithm path scores



Source: own elaborations

Table 4.6. Bootstrapping path coefficients (Keys: p-values in bold are not significant)

	ORIGINAL SAMPLE (O)	SAMPLE MEAN (M)	STANDARD DEVIATION (STDEV)	T STATISTICS (|O/STDEV|)	P VALUES
AMBIDEXTERITY -> CAE	0.422	0.425	0.067	6.311	0
AMBIDEXTERITY -> CRE	0.348	0.349	0.077	4.502	0
AMBIDEXTERITY -> JSAT	0.241	0.237	0.084	2.854	0.004
CAE -> PERF	0.225	0.22	0.089	2.526	0.012
CO -> AMBIDEXTERITY	0.237	0.238	0.078	3.028	0.003
CRE -> PERF	0.187	0.195	0.078	2.405	0.017
LO -> AMBIDEXTERITY	0.417	0.415	0.077	5.431	0
PAP -> AMBIDEXTERITY	0.097	0.101	0.057	1.682	**0.093**

Source: own elaborations

Subsequently, the career stage variable was introduced as moderator of the relationship between ambidexterity and the effectiveness variables that mediate the relationship with performance. The results are available in the and table below.

Table 4.7. Moderation Bootstrapping path coefficients (Keys: p-values in bold are not significant)

	ORIGINAL SAMPLE (O)	SAMPLE MEAN (M)	STANDARD DEVIATION (STDEV)	T STATISTICS (|O/STDEV|)	P VALUES
MODERATING EFFECT 1 -> CAE	0.137	0.135	0.061	2.252	0.025
MODERATING EFFECT 2 -> CRE	0.203	0.202	0.084	2.413	0.016
MODERATING EFFECT 3 -> JSAT	0.187	0.187	0.075	2.479	0.013

Source: own elaborations

Hypotheses testing

From the antecedents' side, it was hypothesized that ambidexterity could be positively linked to customer orientation (0.24), whose hypothesis H1a is supported, and to goal orientation. This last orientation's category needs a specification, as goal orientation includes three constructs in the Silver (2006) paradigm. LO seems to have a positive and significant link with ambidexterity (0.42), PAP does not show any significant relationship with ambidexterity, also confirmed in the bootstrapping analysis, while PAV was excluded from the analysis already in the measurement model assessment phase. Therefore, it can be said that H2b finds only partial support in this study.

Moreover, the results of the analysis propose a non-support for the H2a hypothesis, of a direct relationship between ambidexterity and performance, which leaves room for subsequent hypotheses on mediation by CAE and CRE. The hypothesis, on the other hand, according to which the relationship between ambidexterity and job satisfaction is positive (0.24) and significant (T=2.854 p=0.004), thus H1b is supported.

In particular, it seems that the relationship between ambidexterity and performance is better described by CAE and CRE mediating it, in terms of R^2, and the results of the path coefficients in the SEM algorithm seem to show significant and positive relationships for CAE (0.42) and CRE (0.38). In fact, the bootstrapping results show that the link between CAE and performance is significant (T=6.311 p=0), while the one between CRE and performance is significant (T= 4.502 p=0). Therefore, the hypothesis H3a and H3b are confirmed.

As regards moderation, it was hypothesized that career stages could play a role in defining the relationship between ambidexterity and performance and job satisfaction outputs. The relationship with the efficacy variables, CAE and CRE, and JSAT were then subjected to moderation by CS and all three moderations were found to be significant (T = 2.525 p = 0.025; T = 2.423 p = 0.016; T = 2.479 p = 0.013), supporting

the H4 hypothesis. The hypotheses testing results in term of support are summarised in table 4.8 and discussed in the following section.

Table 4.8. Summary of hypotheses and results

HYPOTHESES	SUPPORT
H1A THERE IS A POSITIVE LINK BETWEEN CUSTOMER ORIENTATION AND AMBIDEXTERITY	Supported
H1B THERE IS A POSITIVE LINK BETWEEN GOAL ORIENTATIONS AND AMBIDEXTERITY	Partially Supported
H2A THERE IS A POSITIVE LINK BETWEEN AMBIDEXTERITY AND PERFORMANCE	Not supported
H2B THERE IS A POSITIVE LINK BETWEEN AMBIDEXTERITY AND JOB SATISFACTION	Supported
H3A CAE MEDIATES THE RELATION WITH AMBIDEXTERITY AND PERFORMANCE	Supported
H3B CRE MEDIATES THE RELATION WITH AMBIDEXTERITY AND PERFORMANCE	Supported
H4 CAREER STAGE MODERATES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AMBIDEXTERITY AND OUTCOMES	Supported

Source: own elaborations

Discussion

This quantitative study was conducted to portray the relationships and impact of salespeople orientations and ambidexterity, in general and in interaction with the career stages, on key sales results (sales performance and job satisfaction), with the added mediating effect of CAE and CRE.

On the antecedent side orientations, that had not been explored by previous studies so far and that the preliminary qualitative study indicated as relevant, were combined with ambidexterity. In particular, customer orientation results having a positive influence on ambidexterity, probably mostly generated by the farming element. According to the literature on customer orientation, highly customer-oriented salespeople will tend to conduct behaviours aimed at increasing long-term customer satisfaction, increasing sales performance and customer satisfaction in the short and long term (Brady and Cronin 2001). This result is relevant as it confirms the important relationship between an approach to sales focused on the customers' priorities, needs and care within a relational paradigm, which is present in ambidexterity.

As far as goal orientation is concerned, the learning orientation relationship is supported, probably mostly driven by the hunting side. As already seen in the

qualitative study, the more locomotion-oriented employees are generally enthusiastic, oriented to opportunities, proactive and solution seeking (Jasmand *et al.* 2012), keen on challenging tasks, persistent and resilient to failure, to which they respond to with renewed effort, and improved strategy (Silver *et al.* 2006). This underlines how an approach aimed at seeking results as a constant improvement of oneself prevails together with a prevalence of hunting activities, implied by research of new customers and the conclusion of contracts, especially with new customers, confirming the trait of proactivity over that of maintenance. From this point of view, the contribution of the performance approach orientation is not significant. This result denotes that the particular attention to achieving results as the objective of the salesperson, who does not seem to be linked significantly to ambidexterity or to any of the hunting and farming sub-dimensions. This result suggests that it is therefore more important to pay attention to the long term and to the constant improvement of oneself and one's potential rather than continuously demonstrating one's value in a competitive way.

This prevalence of the positive and resilient attitude of salespeople is relevant also with ambidexterity, which combined with hunting, brings with it the additional difficulty of allocating key resources such as time and energy dedicated to the already acquired customer base, to customers to acquire.

In a nutshell, the results show us that ambidexterity is influenced by two antecedents: on the one hand the learning orientation, which makes the efforts to acquire customers tireless and consistent, and on the other hand, the customer orientation allows to transform customer satisfaction into long term relations, enabling the existence and sustainability of a successful ambidextrous approach in the modern sales profession. It seems indeed to confirm what emerged in the qualitative study: the need to perform both hunting and farming in of the modern salesperson profession. Although this new and complex paradigm could be accompanied by a further sense of confusion and stress in resource allocation (Cuevas 2018), the balanced self -regulatory mode (Vieira *et al.* 2019) should enable not only to the trade-off but to leverage resources and simultaneous goal achievement.

On the outcomes side, ambidexterity is linked to its outcomes through a stronger hunting drive, as the customer acquisition effectiveness and also the general performance seem increasingly relevant from that side. This partly highlights the way in which salespeople perceive and play the role of sales today: this could confirm the criticality and the use of greater energy for customer acquisition, perhaps also given by a concept of one's role and work still often based on a traditional vision of sales, which would also be confirmed by the average age and the widespread conception of the idea

of success linked to sales closure. Previous literature (De Carlo and Lam 2016) has suggested that usually BtoB salespeople usually perform more farming than hunting activities, therefore this could indicate on the one hand that the effectiveness of the objectives is seen and valued more as a product of hunting activities, although most of the time dedicated and the perceived performances seem to be related to already acquired customers. In fact, the idea of hunting as a set of activity producing relatively more visible results to the organization and to the salespeople themselves, make this idea of sales the preferred one in the self-assessment of individual attitude and performance. Consistently, Cron (1984) suggests that the salesperson is expected to develop a set of skills and selling strategies over time, reinforcing the selling and buying strategies those are likely to be used and which are most effective. This additional self-identification effect to the hunting and customer acquisition could have been enhanced by the nature of the sample, consisting essentially of BtoB sales agents, rather than internal salespeople.

Furthermore, from the outcomes' side, it seems that the link between job satisfaction and ambidexterity is significant and positive. In previous research Job satisfaction was positively related with salesperson hunting orientation (De Carlo and Lam 2016). This result indeed confirms the relationship also with ambidexterity as a whole, besides

some had highlighted the possible contradictions and the additional pressures that ambidexterity could entail in the operational phase, generating confusion on goals and prioritization and stress. The results of the analysis allow affirming that ambidexterity can in fact be considered an element of appreciation and esteem for one's work for the additional performance it allows, also thanks to the compensation and balancing of hunting and farming activities.

Finally, the last aim of the research is to study if and to what extent the career stage can represent a moderator in the relationship between ambidexterity and output variables. Therefore, proceeding on the original model by adding career stage as moderator of ambidexterity relations with CAE and CRE, it therefore seems that both effects of moderation are valid and positive. The relations are equally positive and significant but moderation with CAE is less strong. However, this positive effect could suggest support for the hypothesis that as the individual's career matures, there is a relative shift in attention or in the production of results on other variables such as relational ones. In particular, the impact of the career stage on CRE actually demonstrates that greater maturity transforms the way of working, more based on contacts and customers already present in the salesperson's portfolio. This has a great impact on the way of working of the salesperson, who also supported by his or her set of orientations and attitudes,

especially towards the customer for the farming element, allow him or her to follow the customer for long periods and therefore to benefit from fruitful relationships in the long term, through the career.

These results seem to corroborate the paradigm of sales ambidexterity as the coexistence and balancing of hunting and farming orientations and activities, which seem to allow superior performance and high job satisfaction.

To achieve a balance, organizations should be aware of the importance that hunting has in the roles of sales and goal achievement evaluation and be careful to equally support the achievement of results in terms of both hunting and farming. Furthermore, the awareness that these two orientations are in turn influenced by learning orientation and customer orientation should ensure that future choices on salespeople incentives and training aim to emphasize these aspects as well, in order to obtain a well-aligned, motivated and productive sales force, working towards satisfactory results for themselves and for BtoB organizations.

Limitations

Among the limitations of this study, it is possible to glimpse the particularity of the sample, which is all geographically referenced in Italy and, although broad and diversified at the level of industries, ages and roles, it includes a majority of sales agents, who in fact represent a relatively peculiar type of sales role. However, the importance of the sample portrayed within the FNAARC associates allowed to maintain a form a consistency which would hardly have been ensured if not within very large and structured companies, which do not represent the average of the Italian commercial and economic scenario. However, future studies may target the sales staff of large organizations for an additional level of generalization.

Furthermore, another limitation could be in the computation difficulty of a complex variable such as ambidexterity, which allows the general model a relatively limited predictive capacity (low R^2 scores). In general, it should be recognized that performance resides on many variables including the way the salesperson approaches their time allocation, which however could be flanked by further individual and organizational variables in future studies, to improve the predictive capacity of the model in accordance with Hair et al (2011).

Conclusions

The studies confirm that many variables contribute to define the behavior of the salesperson. Once the influences of role, organization, context and sector have been isolated, however, the influence of orientations, personal preferences attitude clearly emerge as factors influencing the salesperson's behaviour. The salespeople who show ambidextrous orientations are the same who show a great commitment to pursuing a customer orientation, goal orientation, self-improvement and proactivity. In addition, ambidexterity is intuited by many and pursued wherever possible, but this also depends on the subject's career stage. In the quantitative study this relationship between ambidexterity and career stage seems to be confirmed by the interaction between the two dimensions. In fact, career stage has a moderating role in the relationship between ambidexterity and outcomes, proving that career stage has an impact on these dimensions. Therefore, given the relevance of sales ambidexterity in literature and practice, it is suggested to consider the dimension of the career stage in implementation, motivation and training initiatives dedicated to this new paradigm, taking into account the concerns and priorities of salespeople through their career.

Conclusions

In this thesis, it was proposed to retrace the previous research on the figure of the salesperson and to intercept some of the most relevant innovative issues in this domain. After having illustrated the literature on sales ambidexterity and portrayed the various facets, levels of application and main definitions, the literature on the orientation and motivation of the salesperson was then illustrated, leading to present the career stage framework. Few studies had previously explored and investigated at the same time how these two dimensions interacted, thus in the present work this relationship is studied, trying to contribute to extant literature, with a qualitative and a quantitative study.

The concept of salespeople's ambidexterity towards in the customer base (DeCarlo and Lam 2016; Vieira *et al.* 2019), as exploration and exploitation, was explored in its manifestation and eventual development across different career stages, using the deep interview methodology (McCracken 1988; Granot *et al.* 2012). Particular attention was put is the dynamics through which BtoB salespeople approach their customers, whether the same salesperson in some markets is motivated to behave as both hunter and farmer across the customer base or if he/she is more prone to specialize within one of the two roles, or even whether he/she is left free of achieving their quotas and specializing on

the types of customers he /she chooses. Particularly, this first study aimed at exploring the way salespeople allocate their time and resources over the customer base and to observe how the different types of salespeople portrayed their experience and perceptions.

Among the various results:

- A polarization as hunters or farmers emerges in the initial (and final) stages of the career respectively, given by the definition of the role and by the absence (or presence and importance) of a customer base.
- Ambidexterity is seen in most cases as a "categorical imperative" in the work of salespersons, except for those whom role or sector influences them to behave according to one of the two polarizations of hunting or farming.
- As regards orientations, there is a strong attention to customer orientation, the coexistence of goal orientations with a prevalence of learning orientation and the propensity to locomotion focus in most of the interviewees.
- Performance orientation particularly emerges in subjects at the beginning of their career.

- The perception of control and therefore the push towards an assessment focus emerges in particular phases of pressure at the beginning of the career or in the maturity phase, accompanied by a sense of responsibility for the results' achievement.
- An issue emerged spontaneously regarding the future of the sale profession is the ambivalent attitude towards sales technology, which some see as a threat to the work of salespeople or as burdens and excessive control over their activities, while the most dynamic and proactive profiles see it as a great opportunity to improve own performance and professionalism.

Important managerial implications that emerge from this qualitative study are, for example, the importance of orientation, to be considered by sales organizations and by the sales professionals themselves. Greater awareness and application of incentive, motivation and training systems tailored to specific orientations will certainly achieve better results. Specifically, a high goal orientation approach is more common in junior profiles with a strong propensity for performance, so this could be taken into consideration, especially in early career stages. Subsequently, for senior salespeople these measures should be remodelled, so as to avoid that in later stages of the career the salespeople focus excessively on objectives and results, and therefore care too much

about the assessment, losing the locomotion and proactivity. The orientations in general must therefore be taken into consideration in their dynamic combinations and in their evolution in the career stages. Same thing for sales ambidexterity: such an ambitious and complex paradigm cannot be implemented at best, withot a greater awareness of managers, trainers and coaches of which levers and orientations to solicit in salespeople.

The second study, building from the qualitative research, aimed instead at verifying the existence and strength of relationships between the constructs regarding the orientations and dispositions of salespeople across career stages, in relation to sales performance and job satisfaction. The data analysis followed the PLS-SEM methodology (Hair *et al.* 2011; Panagopoulos *et al.* 2020) recommended by the literature in situations where theory is less developed, following a prediction orientation approach, studying a complex model, comprising of many constructs and indicators.

The second study findings are summarized as follows:

- Customer orientation and learning orientation have a positive influence on ambidexterity, given that both emphasize farming and hunting respectively.

- Ambidexterity does not seem to have a direct relationship with performance, but rather mediated one, by the effectiveness in acquiring and retaining customers. The first in particular is the strongest component, probably given by a slight prevalence of customer acquisition activities, which for years have been the main measure of sales evaluation and consequently an element of reinforcement and specialization of salespeople.
- There is job satisfaction in salespeople's work, linked to ambidexterity, probably also supported by the composition of elements, such as hunting and farming, considered vital in obtaining results in terms of performance, as well as the gratification linked to the goal achievement through challenging and complex tasks and the transformation of these results into customer satisfaction and loyalty, which makes the results sustainable in the long term. In short, performance strengthens satisfaction despite the possible greater complexity in implementing an ambidextrous approach.
- Finally, the career stage has a moderating impact in the relationships between ambidexterity and its outcomes, confirming that the attitudes, priorities, motivations and concerns of individuals in their career have an impact in this particular sets of relations and therefore must be taken into consideration when

reflecting or planning salesforce training and incentive operations aiming at sales ambidexterity.

The managerial implications of this study are in line with previous study ones, that is the primary importance of orientations in the relationship with ambidexterity. Essentially, the application of ambidexterity as a paradigm shift is linked above all to a strong attention and orientations to the customer and to learning and self-improvement, that are often prerequisites for successful implementation of paradigm and organizational changes. It is therefore recommended that organizations and sales leaders consider and foster these personal characteristics and dimensions when introducing and implementing ambidexterity. Secondly, the interaction of the career stage with the output variables suggests calibrating the control and incentive mechanisms based on the evolution of the career, in order to better match the objectives and results achieved. Finally, the role of reinforcement between performance and job satisfaction has already been established in the theoretical discussion, but it is important to keep in mind that the motivation will also have to be adapted to the career stage and the level of success, to obtain a balance of efforts and results from sales professionals, both at the beginning and at the end of their careers.

To conclude, this work includes various reasonings and some useful considerations, but it Is also flawed by a series of limitations in the qualitative and quantitative study, which will hopefully represent the starting point for future elaborations. Therefore, further research could investigate these fascinating aspects and mechanisms that concern the salesperson in their conduct of sales activities, within a diachronic, professional and personal development perspective.

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Appendix 1: Systematic literature review

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTION

N.	Title	Author(s)	Year	Journal / conference / book	type of source	Typology	Theoretical background	Methodology	Sample or Interviewees
1	Generating sales while providing service: A study of customer service representatives' ambidextrous behaviour	Jasmand C., Blazevic V. and De Ruyter K.	2012	Journal of Marketing	Article	empirical	regulatory mode theory (Kruglanski *et al.* 2000)	quantitative: survey	119 employees (TLC company's call center)
2	Understanding social media effects across seller, retailer, and consumer interactions	Rapp A., Beitelspacher L.S., Grewal D. and Hughes D.E.	2013	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Article	empirical	theories of social contagion and concepts from relationship marketing	quantitative: survey	28 supplier salespeople, 144 retail store managers (outlet), and 445 retailer customers in B2B sporting goods context
3	Achieving Service-Sales Ambidexterity	Yu T., Patterson P.G. and de Ruyter K.	2013	Journal of Service Research	Review	empirical	organizational ambidexterity (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1994; Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004)	quantitative: survey	2306 retail bank employees
4	Are you (appropriately) experienced?: Service-sales ambidexterity	De Ruyter K., Patterson P. and Yu T.	2014	Handbook of Service Marketing Research	Book Chapter	theoretical	organizational ambidexterity	n.a.	n.a.
5	Do retailers really profit from ambidextrous managers? the impact of frontline mechanisms on new and existing product selling performance	Van Der Borgh M. and Schepers J.J.L.	2014	Journal of Product Innovation Management	Article	empirical	control theory	quantitative: survey + performance	104 salespeople in consumer electronics retailing

6	Killing two birds with one stone: Cross-selling during service delivery	Patterson P., Yu T. and Kimpakorn N.	2014	Journal of business research	Article	empirical	social cognitive theory (Bandura)	quantitative: survey + performance	212 frontline employees working in service sector (Thailand)
7	Converting service encounters into cross-selling opportunities does faith in supervisor ability help or hinder service-sales ambidexterity?	Yu T., Patterson P. and Ruyter K.D.	2015	European Journal of Marketing	Review	empirical	social cognitive theory (Bandura)	quantitative: survey	2306 retail bank employees
8	Leading sales in the 21st century: the ambidextrous sales organization	Cuevas, J. M., Ryals L.J. and Ladik D.M.	2015	Ideas in marketing: finding the new and polishing the old	Conference paper	empirical	n.a.	qualitative: interviews	66 sales leaders
9	Identifying effective hunters and farmers in the salesforce: a dispositional–situational framework	DeCarlo T.E. and Lam S.K.	2016	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Article	empirical	grounded-theory approach / salesperson-level orientations / regulatory focus theory and expectancy	qualitative: in-depth interviews / quantitative: survey	357 B2B salespeople
10	The effect of 'can do' and 'reason to' motivations on service-sales ambidexterity	Sok K.M., Sok P. and De Luca L.M.	2016	Industrial marketing management	Article	empirical	regulatory mode theory	quantitative: survey	247 pharmaceutical sales reps
11	Antecedents, consequences and moderators of ambidextrous behaviours among frontline employees	Kao Y.L. and Chen C.F.	2016	Management decision	Article	empirical	n.a.	quantitative: survey	205 customers (Asian international airline)
12	Hungry to sell, humble to serve: towards understanding the use of	Karhu P. and Schlegelmilch B.B.	2016	Thriving in a new world economy	Conference paper	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

	ambidexterity in optimizing the sales and service mix								
13	Is There a Dark Side of Ambidexterity? Implications of Dueling Sales and Service Orientations	Gabler C.B., Ogilvie J.L., Rapp A. and Bachrach D.G.	2017	Journal of Service Research	Article	empirical	Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker and Demerouti 2007)	quantitative: survey (salespeople + customers)	297 employees (front line employees)
14	Beyond the retention—acquisition trade-off: Capabilities of ambidextrous sales organizations	Nijssen E.J., Guenzi P., and Van der Borgh M.	2017	Industrial marketing management	Article	empirical	Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker and Demerouti 2007) / Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA) framework (Blumberg and Pringle, 1982)	quantitative: survey + performance	296 senior sales managers (Italian international business school alumni)
15	Alternative Mechanisms Guiding Salespersons' Ambidextrous Product Selling	Van der Borgh M., de Jong A. and Nijssen E.J.	2017	British Journal of Management	Article	empirical	structural and situational mechanisms	quantitative: survey + performance	154 salespeople from a communication technology company in Europe
16	The Role of the Sales-Service Interface and Ambidexterity in the Evolving Organization: A Multilevel Research Agenda	Rapp A.A., Bachrach D.G., Flaherty K.E., Hughes D.E., Sharma A. and Voorhees C.M.	2017	Journal of Service Research	Article	theoretical	research on the sales-marketing interface (e.g., Guenzi and Trolio 2006), and sales, marketing, and R&D interface functions / capabilities perspective	n.a.	n.a.
17	Salesperson ambidexterity and customer satisfaction: examining the role of customer demandingness, adaptive selling, and role conflict	Agnihotri R., Gabler C.B., Itani O.S., Jaramillo F. and Krush M.T.	2017	Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management	Article	empirical	control theory and resource allocation logic	quantitative: survey	162 matched salesperson-customer dyads

18	Do sales and service compete? The impact of multiple psychological climates on frontline employee performance	Ogilvie J., Rapp A., Bachrach D.G., Mullins R. and Harvey J.	2017	Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management	Article	empirical	resource-allocation framework	quantitative: survey	252 marketing employees and their 68 supervisors
19	Introduction to the special issue on the intersection of professional selling and service	Rapp A. and Baker T.L.	2017	Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management	Article	theoretical	contingency theory	n.a.	n.a.
20	Generating sales while providing service: The moderating effect of the control system on ambidextrous behaviour	Faia V.S. and Vieira V.A.	2017	International Journal of Bank Marketing	Article	empirical	regulatory focus and sales force control literature	quantitative: survey	163 bank front line employees
21	Test of a mediation model of psychological capital among hotel salespeople	Bouzari, M. and Karatepe O.M.	2017	International journal of contemporary hospitality management	Article	empirical	Psychological capital (PsyCap)	quantitative: survey	26 managers-salespeople dyads (hotel sector Iran)
22	Exploring the antecedents of ambidexterity: a taxonomic approach	Asif M.	2017	Management decision	Article	theoretical	taxonomy framewor	n.a.	n.a.
23	Stimulating employee ambidexterity and employee engagement in SMEs	Ajayi O.M., Odusanya K. and Morton S.	2017	Management decision	Article	empirical	organisational ambidexterity	quantitative: survey	398 shop-floor employees Nigeria
24	Balancing present needs and future options: how employees leverage social networks with clients	Josserand E., Schmitt A., Borzillo S.	2017	Journal of Business Strategy	Article	empirical	social network	qualitative: in-depth interviews	33 semi-structured interviews, at different organizational levels (ranging from top-level

									management to production workers)
25	The transformation of professional selling: Implications for leading the modern sales organization	Cuevas J.M.	2018	Industrial marketing management	Article	empirical	n.a.	qualitative: interviews	21 sales leaders (US, UK and Central Europe)
26	Personal selling and the purchasing function: where do we go from here?	Paesbrugghe, B., Sharma, A., Rangarajan, D. and Syam, N.	2018	Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management	Article	theoretical	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
27	Salesperson ambidexterity in customer engagement: do customer base characteristics matter?	Lam S.K., DeCarlo T.E. and Sharma A.	2019	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Article	empirical	interactional psychology of personality, multitasking paradigm, resource slack	quantitative: survey + experiment	357 salespeople from industrial distribution trade in US
28	The role of self-regulatory mode on acquisition–retention ambidexterity	Vieira V.A., Faia V.S., Boles J., Marioti B.R. and Pereira R.C.	2019	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	Article	empirical	regulatory focus theory and self-regulation theory	quantitative: survey	231 salespeople (multinational food and household products for retail) from Brazil
29	Ambidextrous workforces for managing market turbulence	Caputo F., Giacosa E., Mazzoleni A. and Ossorio M.	2019	Career development international	Article	empirical	organisational ambidexterity	quantitative: survey	1227 Italian firms' employees
30	Firm-level participative leadership and individual-level employee ambidexterity	Chang Y. Y., Chang C. Y., Chen C. W., Chen Y. C. K. and Chang S. Y.	2019	Leadership & organization development journal	Article	theoretical	self-categorization theory	quantitative: survey	1028 employees of tech Taiwanese firms, top management teams (TMTs), unit managers and unit employees, and each firm has two to four units of R&D, M&S or operations

Source: own elaborations

TABLE 2: CONTENT

N.	Title	Author(S)	Year	SA definition	SA Measurement	key findings	b2b / b2c	organizational level
1	Generating sales while providing service: A study of customer service representatives' ambidextrous behaviour	Jasmand C., Blazevic V. and De Ruyter K.	2012	Ambidextrous behaviour 'Engagement in both customer service provision and cross-upselling during service encounters' (p. 22)	SA is measured with a multiplicative term derived from cross-up selling and customer service provision scales	SA is driven the interaction between a locomotion and assessment orientation. SA is positively related to customer satisfaction and sales performance but negatively related to efficiency.	b2b	employee
2	Understanding social media effects across seller, retailer, and consumer interactions	Rapp A., Beitelspacher L.S., Grewal D. and Hughes D.E.	2013	'Service ambidexterity refers to the ability to deliver high quality service while proactively seeking ways to improve service' (p. 548)	Service ambidexterity measure consisted of a four item scale adapted from Yu *et al.* (2010)	Service ambidexterity strengthens the social media usage linkage across channel levels.	b2b + b2c	employee + manager
3	Achieving service-sales ambidexterity	Yu T., Patterson P.G. and de Ruyter K.	2013	contextual ambidexterity, namely, service-sales ambidexterity, which we define as the simultaneous pursuit of service and sales goals by a single branch office	SA is measured with a multiplicative term derived from service (e.g. improving reliability of services) and sales components (e.g. creating new ways to expand client portfolios)	SA is predicted by branch level (e.g. transformational leadership) and employee level (e.g. empowerment) variables. SA is positively related to financial performance.	b2c	employee + organization
4	Are you (appropriately) experienced?: Service-sales ambidexterity	De Ruyter K., Patterson P. and Yu T.	2014	(Jasmand *et al.* 2012; Yu *et al.* 2013)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
5	Do retailers really profit from ambidextrous managers? The impact of	Van Der Borgh M. and Schepers J.J.L.	2014	Management ambidextrous orientation vs employee performance '[Focus on]	SA is assessed with a multiplicative measure of	SA has a positive effect on task autonomy and eventually performance in selling new and existing products.	b2c	employee

	frontline mechanisms on new and existing product selling performance			bridging the potentially contradicting activities of new and existing product selling' (p. 713)	new and existing product-selling orientations			
6	Killing two birds with one stone: Cross-selling during service delivery	Patterson P., Yu T. and Kimpakorn N.	2014	behaviour (following Jasmand, Blazevic & de Ruyter 2012) 'Strategic effort to pursue service and sales goals simultaneously' (p. 1946)	SA is measured using a service sales climate scale which incorporates both service and sales components	SA has a positive effect on sales service performance – an index of supervisor-rated service and sales performance of frontline employees.	b2c	employee
7	Converting service encounters into cross-selling opportunities does faith in supervisor ability help or hinder service-sales ambidexterity?	Yu T., Patterson P. and Ruyter K.D.	2015	orientation + behaviour 'Simultaneous pursuit of service and sales objectives by service firms' (p. 493)	SA is measured with a multiplicative term derived from service (e.g. improving reliability of services) and sales components (e.g. creating new ways to expand client portfolios) Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter (2012)	SA is preceded by both branch context (e.g. social support) and employee characteristics (e.g. learning orientation and self-efficacy). SA has a positive impact on both customer satisfaction and financial performance.	b2c	employee + organization
8	Leading sales in the 21st century: the ambidextrous sales organization	Cuevas, J. M., Ryals L.J. and Ladik D.M.	2015	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
9	Identifying effective hunters and farmers in the salesforce: a dispositional–situational framework	DeCarlo T.E. and Lam S.K.	2016	orientation + behaviour, Engagement in both 'hunting' and 'farming' behaviours in customer retention and acquisition	SA is composed of both hunting (e.g. 'the most enjoyable part of the job is selling to a new account') and farming (e.g. 'the most gratifying is working with an	The effect of SA on profit margins is contingent on a salesperson's level of customer orientation. The hunting andfarming aspectsofSAare driven by promotion and prevention focus valances.	b2b	employee + manager

					established customer') behaviours			
10	The effect of 'can do' and 'reason to' motivations on service-sales ambidexterity	Sok K.M., Sok P. and De Luca L.M.	2016	behaviour - Simultaneous engagement on crossup selling and customer service provision	SA is measured with a multiplicative term derived from cross-up selling and customer service provision scales developed by Jasmand, Blazevic, and de Ruyter (2012)	SA is preceded by 'can do' (locomotion and assessment orientation) and 'reason to' (enjoyment of work and driven to work) motivators and their interactions.	b2b	employee + manager
11	Antecedents, consequences and moderators of ambidextrous behaviours among frontline employees	Kao Y.L. and Chen, C.F.	2016	n.a.	n.a.	there is support for the path intrinsic motivation individual ambidexterity service performance. The results also reveal that that the relationship between intrinsic motivation and individual ambidexterity is moderated by proactive personality, emotional intelligence and extrinsic reward.	b2c	employee
12	Hungry to sell, humble to serve: towards understanding the use of ambidexterity in optimizing the sales and service mix	Karhu P. and Schlegelmilch B.B.	2016	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
13	Is There a Dark Side of Ambidexterity? Implications of Dueling Sales and Service Orientations	Gabler C.B., Ogilvie J.L., Rapp A. and Bachrach D.G.	2017	ambidextrous orientation	simultaneously high customer and selling orientations	With simultaneously high customer and selling orientations, employees can be left with insufficient resources to satisfy competing performance expectations. Service-sales ambidexterity can impact role perceptions through an increase in role conflict.	b2b	employee

14	Beyond the retention—acquisition trade-off: Capabilities of ambidextrous sales organizations	Nijssen E.J., Guenzi P. and Van der Borgh M.	2017	ORGANIZATIONAL: sales ambidexterity as firms with strong acquisition and strong retention capabilities. organizational sales capabilities that can help create ambidextrous sales organizations: incentive management, sales training, and cross-functional cooperation.	Consistent with prior studies examining antecedents of ambidexterity (e.g., Jasmand *et al.* 2012; Mom *et al.* 2009; Jansen *et al.* 2008): firm's sales organization ambidexterity using the multiplicative method (acquisition ´ retention) approach to estimate the front part of the model (i.e. capabilities' impact on ambidexterity).	incentive management, cross functional cooperation, and the interaction of cross functional cooperation and sales training capabilities are positively correlated with sales organization ambidexterity, that also allows customer prioritization. Firms with high levels and aligned acquisition and retention capabilities enjoy superior organic growth. However, contrary to expectation, increases in profit growth are only accomplished if acquisition capabilities are high.	b2b + b2c	manager + organization
15	Alternative mechanisms guiding salespersons' ambidextrous product selling	Van der Borgh M., de Jong A. and Nijssen E.J.	2017	behaviour 'The degree to which sales managers synergize the pursuit of multiple product-selling goals when guiding their subordinates' (p. 4)	Multiplicative measure involving new product and existing product sales behaviour as consisting of two separate constructs that probably trade off.	A sales manager's ambidextrous orientation has a positive effect on new and existing product sales.	b2b	employee + manager
16	The Role of the Sales-Service Interface and Ambidexterity in the Evolving Organization: A Multilevel Research Agenda	Rapp A.A., Bachrach D.G., Flaherty K.E., Hughes D.E., Sharma A., and Voorhees C.M.	2017	ambidexterity is discussed as a micro-foundational capability that resides within employees, accounting for systematic variation in performance (MOA framework)	SA and sales-service interface potential antecedents and outcomes	frontline employee ambidexterity operates as a potential mediating mechanism that must be understood before the benefits of functional integration can be realized / Important Issues Worthy of Future Research: Antecedents to the sales-service interface; Outcomes of the sales-service interface; Relationship between the sales-	b2b + b2c	employee + organization

						service interface and ambidexterity; Antecedents of ambidexterity.		
17	Salesperson ambidexterity and customer satisfaction: examining the role of customer demandingness, adaptive selling, and role conflict	Agnihotri R., Gabler C.B., Itani O.S., Jaramillo F. and Krush M.T.	2017	ambidexterity as the salesperson's 'engagement in both customer service provision and cross-/up-selling during service encounters'. / Building from Yu *et al.* (2013), the sales and marketing literature defines ambidexterity as an employee's ability to achieve or accomplish seemingly conflicting tasks and goals simultaneously (Sok *et al.* 2015). Ambidexterity manifests in an employee's ability to manage these often incompatible tasks and achieve dual performance outcomes (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004).	Sales-service ambidexterity: adapting both the customer service provision	While sales-service ambidexterity positively impacts adaptive selling behaviours, it also increases perceptions of role conflict among salespeople. Customer demandingness moderates these relationships.	b2b	employee
18	Do sales and service compete? The impact of multiple psychological climates on frontline employee performance	Ogilvie J., Rapp A., Bachrach D.G., Mullins R. and Harvey J.	2017	ORGANIZATIONAL: Psychological climate. SA as requiring salespeople to pursue dual goals (i.e., service-sales ambidexterity) (caution for managers as it can potentially	Relationships between service and sales climates and the employee performance outcomes of customer satisfaction, helping behaviour, effort, and sales performance.	Sales and service climates interact with and affect performance. Specifically, performance outcomes differ according to which climate is perceived to be prevalent.	b2c	employee + manager + organization

				affect organizational and employee-related outcomes).				
19	Introduction to the special issue on the intersection of professional selling and service	Rapp A. and Baker T.L.	2017	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
20	Generating sales while providing service: The moderating effect of the control system on ambidextrous behaviour	Faia V.S. and Vieira V.A.	2017	Behaviour (Yu *et al.* 2013): ambidexterity at the individual level with bank front line employees. Individual's ability to manage and integrate different demands and to judge how to divide their time, attention and effort between service provision excellence and sales targets.	Scale developed by Jasmand *et al.* (2012)	1) interactive effect of both regulatory focus, locomotion and assessment, predicts frontline employee ambidextrous behaviour. 2) this interaction effect suffers a three-way interaction under organizational control system. 3) organizational control system also moderates the impact of ambidextrous behaviour on performance, such that outcome based-control system amplifies the relationship. 4) ambidextrous behaviour mediates the indirect effect of control system on sales performance, generating stronger (vs. weaker) results under an outcome-based control system (vs. behaviour-based control system).	b2c	employee
21	Test of a mediation model of psychological capital among hotel salespeople	Bouzari, M. and Karatepe O.M.	2017	Yu *et al.* (2012)	Yu *et al.* (2012)	psychological capital functions as a full mediator of the influence of servant leadership on the aforementioned outcomes	b2c	manager + employee
22	Exploring the antecedents of ambidexterity: a taxonomic approach	Asif M.	2017	n.a.	n.a.	Two taxonomy frameworks have been developed: one is based on infrastructural elements, including organizational structures, processes, and context, while the other is based on different organizational levels (i.e. organizational, group, and individual) at	n.a.	employee + manager + organization

						which different antecedents exist. Most of the antecedents of ambidexterity reported in the literature fall in the category of "processes" – both individual/social and technical/procedural		
23	Stimulating employee ambidexterity and employee engagement in smes	Ajayi O.M., Odusanya K. and Morton S.	2017	n.a.	Employee passive ambidexyerity (EPA) + Employee active ambidexterity (EAA)	Employees' level of engagement increases when businesses promote an organisational context that decentralises decision making that promotes the delegation of authority, reduced emphasis on formal rules and procedures; lateral interactions among employees; and team work to mention a few.	b2c	employee + organization
24	Balancing present needs and future options: how employees leverage social networks with clients	Josserand E., Schmitt A. and Borzillo S.	2017	n.a.	Ambidexterity at the business unit level (Rogan and Mors, 2014)	The exploitation benefits of individual social capital are three-fold: commercial leads, repeated business and value-added services. Finally, the impact of strong and weak ties is not only on the volume but also on the nature of sales.	b2b	employee + organization
25	The transformation of professional selling: Implications for leading the modern sales organization	Cuevas J.M.	2018	ORGANIZATIONAL: Firms that can simultaneously manage exploration and exploitation are referred to as ambidextrous (O'reilly III & Tushman, 2013).	sales organizations can focus concurrently on exploitation and efficiency gains (i.e. transactional selling) and exploration and effectiveness (i.e. strategic or consultative selling).	Senior sales leaders need to consider sales management approaches that embrace in a more fundamental way, the paradoxical nature of the contexts in which they work. / the speed by which transformations in sales are occurring surpass organization's ability to develop talent, sales leaders will need to instill self-leadership as a key competence within their sales forces to enable the "process through which people achieve the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to perform" / Paradoxical leadership appeals for a "shift from an 'either/or' mindset to a 'both/and' one by seeing the	b2b + b2c	employee + manager + organization

						virtues of inconsistency, recognizing that resources are not always finite, and embracing change rather than chasing stability" / interventions will unlikely sustain growth and performance over time. The modern sales organization will require 'plural' approaches that enable the pursuit of selling (i.e. transactional), and customer development (i.e. consultative and strategic selling) simultaneously		
26	Personal selling and the purchasing function: where do we go from here?	Paesbrugghe B., Sharma A., Rangarajan D. and Syam N.	2018	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
27	Salesperson ambidexterity in customer engagement: do customer base characteristics matter?	Lam S.K., DeCarlo T.E. and Sharma A.	2019	how customer base newness alters when salespeople are more or less likely to engage in sequential ambidexterity in customer engagement.	SA based on DeCarlo and Lam (2015)	First, a salesperson's orientation ambidexterity in both hunting and farming leads to significantly higher (lower) sales growth when his or her existing customer base is large (small). Second, high levels of customer base newness in a salesperson's customer portfolio weaken the relationship between hunting time allocation at time t – 1 and hunting time allocation at time t, suggesting that salespeople are not subject to a success trap in hunting. However, salespeople are subject to a success trap in farming.	b2b	
28	The role of self-regulatory mode on acquisition–retention ambidexterity	Vieira V.A., Faia V.S., Boles J., Marioti B.R., Pereira R.C.	2019	acquisition–retention by allocating effort toward maintaining relationships with current customers (Carter *et al.*, 2014) as well as prospecting	SA based on DeCarlo and Lam (2015)	Both regulatory modes can be used together and balanced to explain salesperson ambidexterity. The tradeoff between both modes of self-regulation helps to develop dual customer acquisition and retention orientations and to balance the trade-off	b2b	employee

				and generating leads (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015)		between movement and accuracy in goal-relevant tasks.		
29	Ambidextrous workforces for managing market turbulence	Caputo F., Giacosa E., Mazzoleni A. and Ossorio M.	2019	n.a.	n.a.	Multidisciplinary human resources' study background, previous human resources' work experience and human resources' soft capabilities are positively linked to companies' return on sales, providing indirect evidence about the role of ambidextrous workforces in supporting companies facing emerging market turbulence.	b2b	employee
30	Firm-level participative leadership and individual-level employee ambidexterity	Chang Y. Y., Chang C. Y., Chen C. W., Chen Y. C. K. and Chang S. Y.	2019	n.a.	Individual-level employee ambidexterity adapted from Mom *et al.* (2009)	Individual-level personal identification partially mediated the relationship between firm-level participative leadership and individual-level employee ambidexterity, and individual-level coworker social support moderated the effect of firm-level participative leadership on individual-level employee ambidexterity through individual-level personal identification.	b2b	employee + organization

Source: own elaborations

Appendix 2: Survey items

Construct Name, Source and Anchor	***ITEMS***	***ITEMS***
SECTION 1 - ORIENTATIONS		
		Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:
Salesperson Learning Goal Orientation – LO (Silver *et al.* 2006) 7-point scale, "1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree"	LO1	2. It is worth spending a lot of time learning new approaches for dealing with customers.
	LO2	3. An important part of being a salesperson is continually improving your sales skills.
	LO3	5. It is important for me to learn from each selling experience I have.
	LO4	6. Learning how to be a better salesperson is of fundamental importance to me.
Performance-Approach Orientation – PAP (Silver *et al.* 2006) 7-point scale, "1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree"	PAPO1	3. I am motivated by the thought of outperforming my peers in my firm.
	PAPO2	4. It is important to me to do better than the other salespeople in my firm.
	PAPO3	5. I am striving to demonstrate my ability relative to other salespeople in my firm.
	PAPO4	6. It is important to me to do well compared to others in my firm.
Performance-Avoidance Orientation – PAV (Silver *et al.* 2006) 7-point scale: "1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree"	PAVO1	1. My fear of performing poorly at my job is often what motivates me.
	PAVO2	3. I often think to myself, "What if I do badly in my job?"
	PAVO3	4. I worry about the possibility of not meeting my sales goals or quotas.
	PAVO4	6. I just want to avoid doing poorly in my job.
SECTION 2 - AMBIDEXTERITY		
Acquisition orientation – Hunting – AO (Lam de Carlo and Sharma, 2019) 7-point scale, "1=does not describe me at all and 7=describes me very well"	AO1	1. To "hunt" for a new sales opportunity is the most enjoyable part of the job.
	AO2	2. I am at my best when I engage a new prospect that I have never met before.
	AO3	3. I prefer to spend the majority of my day prospecting and closing new accounts.
	AO4	4. The most enjoyable part of the job is selling to new accounts.
Retention orientation – Farming – RO (Lam de Carlo and Sharma, 2019) 7-point scale, "1=does not describe me at all and 7=describes me very well"	RO1	1. Spending time working with current customers is the most enjoyable part of the job.
	RO2	2. My best attributes are my customer relations skills where I work for the best interests of my current customers.
	RO3	3. The most gratifying is working with an established customer.
	RO4	4. Of all my responsibilities, I most enjoy using my skills to maintain and grow existing accounts.
SECTION 3 - PERFORMANCE AND SATISFACTION		

Performance – PERF (Homburg, Müller and Klarmann 2011)		How do you evaluate your sales performance in comparison with your colleagues, based …
	PERF1	1. on the achieved sales in the last 12 months?
	PERF2	2. on the achieved orders in the last 12 months?
	PERF3	3. on the achieved total contribution margin in the last 12 months?
Salesperson's evaluations of his or her job satisfaction – JSAT (Guenzi *et al.* 2019) 5-point scale, "1=Completely Disagree and 5=Completely Agree"		Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:
	JSAT1	1. your work is very satisfying.
	JSAT2	2. you feel that you are really doing something worthwhile in your job.
	JSAT3	3. your work is challenging.
	JSAT4	4.your work is very interesting.
	JSAT5	5.your work gives you a sense of accomplishment.
SECTION 4 - EFFECTIVENESS		
		To what extent do you agree on following statements about relating to customers? *I'm very capable to:*
Customer acquisition effectiveness – CAE – adapted from Jolson (2017), 7-point scale "1=strongly disagree and 7= strongly agree"	CAE1	1. Find new prospects.
	CAE2	2. Get in contact with new prospects.
	CAE3	3. Establish rapport with potential new customers.
	CAE4	4. Probe for the needs of potential new customers.
	CAE5	5. Make sales presentations to potential new customers.
Customer retention effectiveness – CRE – adapted from Crosby *et al.* (2017) relational selling behaviour, 7-point scale "1=strongly disagree and 7= strongly agree"	CRE1	1. Contact my customers just to stay "in touch" and make sure they are still satisfied.
	CRE2	2. Contact my customers to better serve their needs.
	CRE3	3. Provide information customers request in a timely manner.
	CRE4	4. Explain to my customers why it is a good idea to keep the current contract in force.
	CRE5	5. Contact my customers to sell new services/products.
SECTION 5 - CAREER STAGE		
		Please indicate the level of concern you currently have for each of the tasks listed below:
CAREER STAGE - CS1 (Perrone *et al.* 2003) 5-point scale, "1=no concern and 5=great concern"	CS1	1. Finding the line of work that I am very best suited for.
	CS2	2. Finding a line of work that interest me.
	CS3	3. Getting started in my chosen career field.
	CS4	4. Setting down in a job I can stay with.
	CS5	5. Becoming especially knowledgeable or skillful at work.
	CS6	6. Planning how to get ahead in my established field of work.
	CS7	7. Keeping the respect of people in my field.
	CS8	8. Attending meetings and seminars on new methods.
	CS9	9. Identifying new problems to work on.
	CS10	10. Developing easier ways of doing my work.
	CS11	11. Planning well for retirement.
	CS12	12. Having a good place to live in retirement.
CAREER STAGE - CS2 (Flaherty and Pappas 2002) Self-Selection Measure		Please select the proposition that represent you the most in the present career stage.

		1. You are most concerned with finding an occupation in which you can succeed and grow as a professional. A fundamental question that you are dealing with is: "What do I want to do for the rest of my life?" 2. You are most concerned with earning stability within your occupation. You want to secure a place in the working world. Achieving professional success is of utmost importance to you. You strongly desire promotion. 3. You are most concerned with retaining your current position, status, and performance level in your career. You are less concerned with future promotion opportunities and more concerned with keeping current with new developments in your field. 4. You are most concerned with reducing your workload. You are looking to cut down on your working hours and are more concerned with developing hobbies to replace work interests and planning for your retirement.
SECTION 6 - TECHNICAL QUESTIONS		
		These questions are included for technical reasons. Please respond to what extent you agree or disagree to the following statements.
CMV marker variable – CMV (Pons, Mourali, and Nyeck 2006) 5-point, "1=totally agree and 5=totally disagree"	CMV1	1. For me, attending sporting events is a real pleasure.
	CMV2	2. I am always excited when I am going to a sporting event.
	CMV3	*3. I am always enthusiastic when I think about attending a sporting event.*
	CMV4	4. When I attend a sporting event, I sometimes feel like I am part of the event.

Source: own elaborations

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