

The effect of working relationship quality on salesperson performance and job satisfaction: Adaptive selling behavior in Korean automobile sales representatives

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Abstract

The adaptive selling behavior (ASB) concept has been the focus of significant attention in research and practice alike over the past decade. However, there has been but a few studies that have investigated this practice outside of a U.S. context. Thus, as this research stream continues to take root, significant questions relating to ASB theory, conceptualization and measurement, and generalizability remain. Given this lack of non-Western ASB research, the authors consider the implications of national culture on ASB. Next, they develop and test a model utilizing a sample of Korean automobile representatives. Salesperson working relationship quality is suggested as mediating the ASB–performance relationship and a new outcome, job satisfaction, is identified. The results serve not only to clarify previously unclear relationships, but also extend our understanding of adaptive selling practices in non-Western cultures.

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Keywords: Adaptive selling behavior; Sales people performance; Job satisfaction; Working relationship quality; Supervisor relationship; Colleague relationship

1. Issues in adaptive selling behavior research

Since Weitz (1978) first posited the relationship between adaptive selling behavior (hereafter, ASB) and performance, ASB has drawn growing interest in research and practice alike (Sujan et al., 1994). However, of the more than 100 published empirical studies on ASB, the results of all but a small fraction are based on samples from the United States and other Western nations (Franke and Park, 2004). In countries like the United States, whose national culture is generally characterized by a high degree of individualism, neither buyers nor sellers are constrained by the need to conform to group norms (Hofstede, 1980). Similarly, in low uncertainty-avoidant

Western cultures, customers and salespeople should be relatively more receptive to varied sales approaches. Given these predominant cultural characteristics, the role of ASB in driving superior sales performance in Western cultures is not surprising. What remains less clear is how salesperson adaptiveness might lead to favorable outcomes in countries with vastly dissimilar national cultures.

While prior research has gauged the effects of national culture on innovation adoption (e.g., Van Everdingen and Waarts, 2003) and marketing decision making (e.g., Kogut and Singh, 1988; Steenkamp et al., 1999), experts note that the manner by which exogenous factors such as national culture affect the responsiveness of businesses to their customers and markets is not well understood (Kohli and Jaworski, 1994). In considering the potential effects of culture on ASB, the extent to which salesperson adaptiveness is expected, or even welcomed, in all cultures is unknown. Assuming some level of adaptation is universally

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desired, it seems likely that the manner by which salespeople adapt will vary across cultural contexts. For example, in more collectivist cultures, it may be necessary for salespeople to alter their presentation in such a way as to appeal more to the standards of the customer's in-group, as opposed to individual tastes.

As the pace of globalization accelerates, questions regarding the portability of marketing constructs and measures take on mounting importance. Indeed, Steenkamp (2001) suggests, "the further advancement of marketing as an academic discipline requires that the validity of our theories and models be examined in other cultural settings as well as to identify their degree of generalizability and to uncover boundary conditions" (p. 30). Thus, confirming the cross-cultural generalizability of ASB remains a vital step in advancing this research stream. Our study makes headway in addressing this void by testing a model involving adaptive selling practices amongst Korean automobile salespeople. As South Korea's national culture is viewed as collectivistic and as having a low tolerance for ambiguity (Hofstede, 1980), it offers a stark contrast to prior ASB research, which has been conducted mainly in Western settings.

In response to equivocal results of prior ASB–performance studies, we suggest that salesperson working relationship quality operates as a key mediating variable. We reason that while a salesperson may possess superior adaptive skills, the assistance of others is often required in fulfilling customer requirements, particularly in more complex sales. Thus, enhancements to overall performance resulting from increased ASB may be conditioned on the salesperson's corresponding ability to maintain high-quality working relationships with managers, peers, and administrative personnel. We believe that this effect should be accentuated given the collectivistic, uncertainty-avoidant nature of Korean culture. To our knowledge, no research has empirically examined the direct role of supervisor–subordinate relationship quality or the quality of other critical employee work relationships within an ASB framework. Additionally, we fill a notable gap in the literature by testing the relationship between ASB and a previously unpublished outcome: job satisfaction.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the conceptual origins of ASB and consider the potential influence of culture upon adaptive sales practices. Second, a theoretical model is developed, stressing the importance of working relationship quality in implementing ASB practices. Third, we detail the research methods utilized in our study, including a brief summation of our context, data collection, and measures. Fourth, the model's overall fit and each of our hypotheses are tested via a structural equation model. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the findings as well as its managerial and theoretical implications. Directions for new ASB research are suggested.

2. Theory development

2.1. Adaptive selling behavior (ASB)

Adaptive selling is defined as the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based upon perceived information about the nature of the selling situation (Sujan, 1986). While the roots of the ASB construct are planted in early sales interaction research (e.g., Chapple and Gordon, 1947; Evans, 1963), it is the work of Weitz et al. that has invigorated this stream over the past two decades. Weitz (1981) found that salespeople face unique opportunities to adapt to each customer and to each sales situation, such that the product or service offered for sale and the salesperson were presented in the most appealing manner. Sujan (1986) found that the communicator's adaptive style had a strong positive relationship with the preference for a relational message, suggesting that salespeople can work smarter by choosing approaches that are appropriate for particular customers, or by increasing their repertoire of sales approaches. Weitz et al. (1986) proposed a conceptual model of salesperson adaptability and the relationship between knowledge structures, motivation, and the practice of adaptive selling, concluding that adaptability centers on one's ability to alter his/her own behavior when changes occur in a selling situation. Spiro and Weitz (1990) subsequently offered the 16-item ADAPTS scale, which has since served as the predominant measure of the ASB construct.

Empirical studies examining the direct relationship between ASB and performance have met with inconsistent results (Table 1). For example, Predmore and Bonnice (1994) found that salespersons' observed adaptability was

Table 1
The conflicting relationship between ASB and performance

Author(s)	Hypothesized relationship	Results
Anglin et al. (1990)	ASB items→performance items	Some significant Some not significant Some have negative correlations
Weilbaker (1990, 1991)	ASB→sales performance	Some significant Some not significant
Goolsby et al. (1992)	ASB→several types of performance	Some significant Some not significant
Lollar (1993)	ASB→sales performance	Not significant
Boorum (1994)	ASB→sales performance	Significant
Porter (1994)	ASB→sales performance	Significant
Predmore and Bonnice (1994)	Adaptability→sales success	Significant
Marks et al. (1996)	Adaptive belief→performance Adaptive practice→performance	Not significant Significant
McMurrian (1996)	ASB→sales performance	Not significant
Brown (1999)	Working smart→performance	Significant
Boorum et al. (1998)	ASB→sales performance	Significant
Li (1999)	ASB→sales performance	Significant

positively related to measures of sales success in a sample of telemarketing representatives. Goolsby et al. (1992) investigated the relationship between adaptiveness and performance but failed to identify a consistent relationship. In two studies involving pharmaceutical representatives, Weilbaker (1990, 1991) found only partial support for the proposed ASB–performance relationship. These conflicting findings hint at the potential influences of unexplored boundary conditions or problems concerning construct conceptualization and measurement (Sujan et al., 1994).

Our study investigates the influence of one such boundary condition, salesperson working relationship quality. We believe that while the practice of ASB should enable the salesperson to do a better job of framing the company's value proposition to the customer, the efforts of others are most often required in the delivery of customer value. Therefore, we expect that the quality of the salesperson's working relationships will play a key role in directing ASB outcomes. While we believe that the importance of working relationship quality will be significant across cultures, its importance should be heightened in our collectivist, uncertainty-avoidant Korean context.

2.2. Collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and working relationship quality

Several researchers have conceptually linked aspects of national culture to personal selling practices (e.g., Sheth, 1983; Kale and Barnes, 1992). While empirical work in this area is sparse, Dwyer (1997) reported significant differences between national cultures in a study of the sales practices of insurance sales representatives from five countries. Collectively, these prior studies provide a solid rationale for expecting differences in the practice and effectiveness of ASB across cultures. Specifically, this paper will discuss the influence of the two cultural dimensions upon which Korea and the United States differ most (Hofstede, 1980): individualism/collectivism and uncertainty avoidance.

Triandis and McCusker (1990) note the most important cultural dimension in social behavior is the relative emphasis on individualism versus collectivism. This dimension of culture relates to whether people want to work alone and be free to operate as individuals, or prefer to work in groups and be thought of as part of interacting sets of people. In collectivist societies, the group is the dominant structure and most actions are evaluated in terms of effects on other people. Another significant dimension of culture relates to risk aversion. Hofstede (1980) describes uncertainty avoidance as the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid them. In strong uncertainty-avoidant cultures, there is a need for rules and formality to structure life. Competence is highly valued, resulting in a strong belief in specialists. Thus, when tasks involve teamwork, people in high

uncertainty-avoidant cultures want team roles clearly defined.

While Korean salespeople and customers may tend to be less individualistic and require greater certainty in their day-to-day activities, such an environment does not lessen the positive benefit of salesperson adaptiveness. In fact, anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that adaptations within the marketing communication process in South Korea are quite frequent (Korea Herald, 2002). However, we do believe that the range of spontaneous adaptations during the sales interaction is most likely to be constrained to those which are more readily accepted by the work unit and least likely to create ambiguity.

2.3. ASB and working relationship quality

We suggest that a more holistic view of adaptive selling is appropriate—one that considers the impact of salesperson adaptation within the context of the firm at large and not just within the seller–buyer dyad. Without corresponding increases in working relationship quality between the salesperson and their work unit, we believe that the practice of ASB will inevitably lead to greater individual ambiguity and group disharmony. Unless these behaviors are reinforced, adaptive selling practices will eventually be discontinued or incompletely adopted.

This perspective is highly consistent with previous work involving the influence of culture on innovation adoption. For example, Shane et al. (1995) found that people in collectivist cultures are more likely to prefer appeals for cross-functional support for the innovation effort. In uncertainty-avoidant societies, people prefer champions to adapt the innovation to the norms and rules of the organization, or to alter the rules of the organization to accept the innovation (Venkataraman et al., 1992). These findings support the notion that the successful adoption of ASB requires shared understanding and cooperation between the salesperson and relevant members of their work unit. While Korean salespeople are likely to seek some threshold level of working relationship quality in order to maintain harmony within their group and decrease uncertainty, increases in ASB require the salesperson to also pursue higher levels of working relationship quality within their organization. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 1. The practice of adaptive selling is positively related to working relationship quality.

2.4. Working relationship quality and sales performance

This study examines salespersons' working relationship quality in terms of the leader-member exchange (LMX) paradigm. According to LMX theory, leaders develop differentiated relationships with followers on a dyadic basis (Uhl-Bien and Graen, 1998). Research has documented that higher-LMX employees are granted greater status, latitude,

support, and rewards by their managers and enjoy more reciprocal influence, mutual trust, and respect than lower-LMX employees (Dansereau et al., 1975; Uhl-Bien and Graen, 1998). Conversely, in the case of low-LMX relationships, such close supervision is likely to restrict the salesperson’s ability to respond and adapt to changing customer needs and serves to constrain performance (DelVecchio, 1998).

While the salesperson–sales manager dyad is a key component of the socialization process for most sales organizations, there are other relationships that also serve to delineate the social structure of sales organizations. Within a peer relationship context, Seers (1989) examined team-member exchange (TMX) quality as a complimentary role-making construct to LMX. His results demonstrated that TMX quality varied between groups based upon the autonomy granted the group by management and within groups in relation to job attitudes. To the extent that an employee must rely on coworkers for favors or assistance, the quality of the salesperson’s peer relationships is also likely to play a key role in driving sales performance. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 2. Salesperson working relationship quality is positively related to performance.

2.5. Working relationship quality and job satisfaction

Overall job satisfaction indicates how employees feel about their work. Churchill et al. (1979) highlight the

importance of job satisfaction as a driver of sales force retention. These authors conceptualized job satisfaction as a multidimensional construct, including satisfaction with one’s job, supervisor, co-workers, payment conditions, promotional programs, company policy, and feelings of job security. Similarly, we conceptualize salesperson job satisfaction as involving overall satisfaction for the job itself as well as satisfaction with specific job conditions including payment, promotion, and security.

Supervisor and coworker behaviors are important determinants of employee job satisfaction. The influence of various leadership styles, communication, and rewards upon subordinate affective and attitudinal responses has been extensively studied in various literatures. For example, Keller and Szilagyi (1976) found that leader rewards were positively related to satisfaction and negatively associated with role conflict and ambiguity. From a LMX perspective, several studies have analyzed the impact of working relationships upon employee satisfaction. Scandura and Graen (1984) identified low employee turnover, high job satisfaction, and high performance as consequences of high-quality leader-member exchange. Additionally, Tanner and Castleberry (1990) found relationship type to be a strong predictor of sales force turnover, particularly amongst high performers. Therefore, we expect:

Hypothesis 3. Working relationship quality is positively associated with job satisfaction. Fig. 1 provides a conceptual diagram illustrating all hypothesized relationships.

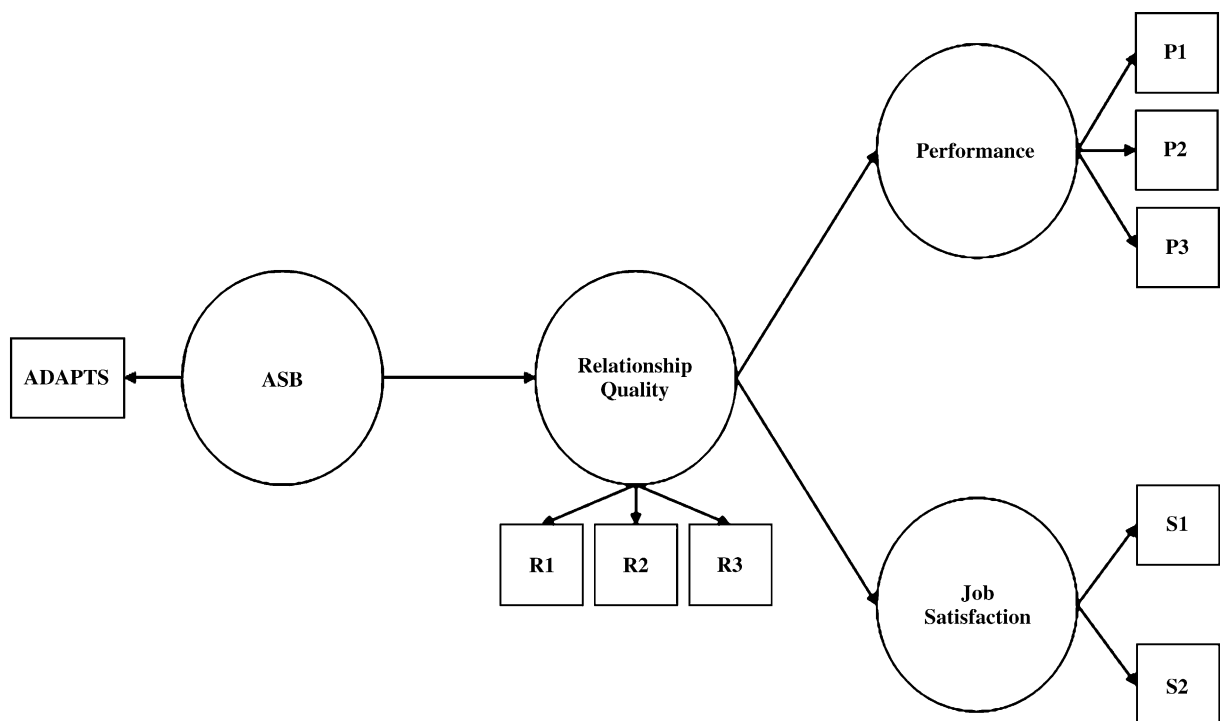


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample and data collection

The first author conducted several interviews with Korean managers prior to translating the original English scales into Korean. The translated questionnaire was then pretested via a sample of 20 Korean automobile salespeople, resulting in a number of modifications to the final questionnaire. Following the interviews and pretests, we found that several of the reverse-coded questions were frequently misunderstood. As a result, the decision was made to delete the reverse-coded items of the original ADAPTS scale.

A convenience sample of automobile salespeople consisting of subjects selling in Seoul, South Korea, was recruited from a major Korean automobile company. Data were drawn from 35 sales office locations. Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 2.

Although the normal caveats concerning convenience sampling apply to this study, our sample was purposively drawn cognizant of our research hypotheses. In addition, to avoid problems typical of self-report measurement, the marketing director provided actual sales data for every salesperson to cross-validate the self-report performance measures we obtained. In order to gain cooperation from subjects, a letter of support from the company's CEO was included in the survey packet. In addition, the national marketing director phoned the sales manager of each of the 35 locations, requesting their cooperation. Data collection occurred over 4 weeks and resulted in a final usable sample of 199, with a response rate of about 90%.

3.2. Measures

All of the constructs used in this study were drawn from existing literature and were translated and adapted for the context of this research. With but a few exceptions, all measures used seven-point, multi-item reflective scales. The anchors were either "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" or "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied". All

measures and covariances between items are summarized in Appendices A and B.

3.2.1. Adaptive selling behavior

It has been suggested that the basis for conflicting ASB–performance findings may rest in the varied conceptualizations of both sales performance and ASB (e.g., Sujan et al., 1994; Goolsby et al., 1992). Spiro and Weitz (1990) originally suggested that their ADAPTS measure was a unidimensional scale comprised of six distinct facets. However, Marks et al. (1996) find two unique factors within ADAPTS—one pertaining to adaptive beliefs and the second to adaptive behaviors. These authors found that only the second factor, practice of adaptive selling, was significantly related to performance. Thus, they contend that research using ADAPTS as a unidimensional scale runs the risk of confounding results. We follow Marks et al. (1996) by measuring ASB using only the seven items from the ADAPTS scale pertaining to adaptive behaviors. This scale proved adequately reliable ($\alpha=0.74$).

3.2.2. Performance

In measuring performance, we incorporated subjective and objective measures. Behrman and Perreault's (1984) scale measured seven dimensions of sales performance, including: achievement of sales objectives, control of unnecessary expenses, development of customer support, communications with the company, use of technical knowledge, ability to work with customers, and ability to work well with company personnel. Five items from this scale were adapted for the study, providing a subjective self-assessment of the salesperson's performance ($\alpha=0.79$) and categorized into two performance indicators: financial and customer. To minimize problems associated with self-report measurement, we also used sales data provided by the company as a third performance indicator.

3.2.3. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was operationalized using items adapted from Churchill et al. (1976). We selected seven items from their battery of 26, assessing satisfaction with specific aspects of the job: pay, opportunities for advancement, job security, company policies, supervisor, fellow workers, and overall job satisfaction. These seven items were rated on seven-point scales ranging from "very satisfied" to "very dissatisfied". ($\alpha=0.92$) and categorized into two indicators: overall job satisfaction (one item) and sum of detailed satisfactions (six items).

3.2.4. Working relationship quality

Working relationship quality was measured using six items created specifically for this study. These items represent three distinct indicators of employee–firm relationship quality. The first indicator item represents the employee's relationship with colleagues. Three items quantify the second indicator, employee–manager(s) relationship. The

Table 2
The demographic characteristics of the sample

	Demographic factors	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	193	97.0
	Female	6	3.0
Education	High school	71	35.7
	College	128	64.3
Marital status	Not	77	38.7
	Married	122	61.3
Age (years)	20–29	59	29.6
	30–39	134	67.3
	Above 40	6	3.0
Work experience with the company (years)	1–4	119	59.8
	5–9	69	34.7
	Above 10	11	5.5

Table 3
The results of confirmatory factor analysis

Construct indicator	Adaptive selling	Relationship quality			Job satisfaction		Performance		
	ADAPTS	R1	R2	R3	S1	S2	P1	P2	P3
Estimates (<i>t</i> value)	0.85 (N/A)	0.64 (N/A)	0.68 (6.27)	0.60 (5.96)	0.50 (N/A)	0.63 (4.19)	0.68 (N/A)	0.72 (6.81)	0.65 (6.63)
SMC	0.72	0.41	0.45	0.35	0.50	0.63	0.46	0.52	0.41

SMC: squared multiple correlation; chi-square=30.40 with 22df, $p=0.109$, RMSEA=0.044.
Standardized coefficient and *t* value in parentheses. *t* values greater than 1.96 are significant.
One indicator of all constructs is set to one to standardize the measurement scale.

final two items measure relationship quality with other supporting departments, in this case, service and human resource management ($\alpha=0.82$).

3.3. Measurement validity

All constructs were evaluated on the following criteria: unidimensionality, reliability, and discriminant and convergent validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). To evaluate the unidimensionality of ASB in our context, we examined the modification indices and residuals. When considered in light of the large number of items, no substantial departure from unidimensionality was observed. The coefficient α values for all measures exceed Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) suggested standard of 0.70 as a lower bound, with scores ranging from 0.92 (job satisfaction) to 0.74 (ASB). Next, following the two-stage approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we used LISREL 8.51 to test the estimated measurement model prior to assessing the structural relationships. The results of the measurement models show that our selected items provide good explanations for each construct. As indicated by the results of CFA (Table 3), all items have a significant loading on their corresponding construct with the lowest *t*-value being 4.19. A pairwise comparison of the constructs in the modification indices indicated that all latent trait correlations between constructs are significantly different than one, establishing discriminant validity. Based upon the significant loading estimates and the high construct reliabilities, we established support for convergent validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

Information obtained from the measurement model was then used to help estimate the overall structural model. Retaining each scale item as a reflective indicator of ASB resulted in identification problems; therefore these items were combined to form a single indicator measure. All errors for summation indicators were set at one minus the composite reliability (Williams and Podsakoff, 1989).

4. Results and analysis

4.1. Goodness of fit of the overall model

To examine the structural relationships, the hypothesized main effect model was estimated. The results of the

hypothesized relationships between the constructs are reported in Fig. 2. The overall fit of the structural model is highly acceptable. The chi-square/*df* ratio below 2.0 and the CFI of 0.93 is excellent, confirming that the data fit the proposed structural model. Other goodness of fit statistics meet commonly accepted standards (GFI=0.951; AGFI=0.912; RMSEA=0.065).

4.2. Results of hypotheses tests

In analyzing the results of the structural model, we conclude that all proposed relationships received strong support. Standardized estimates of all hypothesized paths are presented in Fig. 2. Specifically, we find that ASB has a significant positive influence on relationship quality ($\gamma_{11}=0.51$; $t=5.49$; $p<0.01$), supporting H1. The direct path between relationship quality and performance is significantly positive ($\gamma_{21}=0.47$; $t=4.05$; $p<0.01$), bolstering H2. Finally, in testing the direct relationship of working relationship quality upon job satisfaction suggested by H3, we found a significant relationship ($\gamma_{31}=0.53$, $t=3.29$, $p<0.01$).

4.3. Direct versus indirect effects of ASB–performance

We then sought to determine the extent to which working relationship quality mediated the relationships between ASB and our two outcomes: performance and job satisfaction. Analyzing the indirect effects of ASB on two outcome variables via working relationship quality represents an empirical test of mediation. If the indirect effects of adaptive behavior (via working relationship quality) on two outcome variables are significant in comparison to the direct effects of ASB on performance and job satisfaction, this helps to demonstrate the important role of working relationship in implementing ASB strategies.

To perform this comparison, we analyzed two additional models, adding direct paths from ASB to performance and job satisfaction, respectively. We then compared the chi-square values of the more general models with the chi-square value of the more restrictive model (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Our results showed that the fit of the model was significantly improved for both of the alternative models. Therefore, ASB has strong direct effects both on performance and job satisfaction.

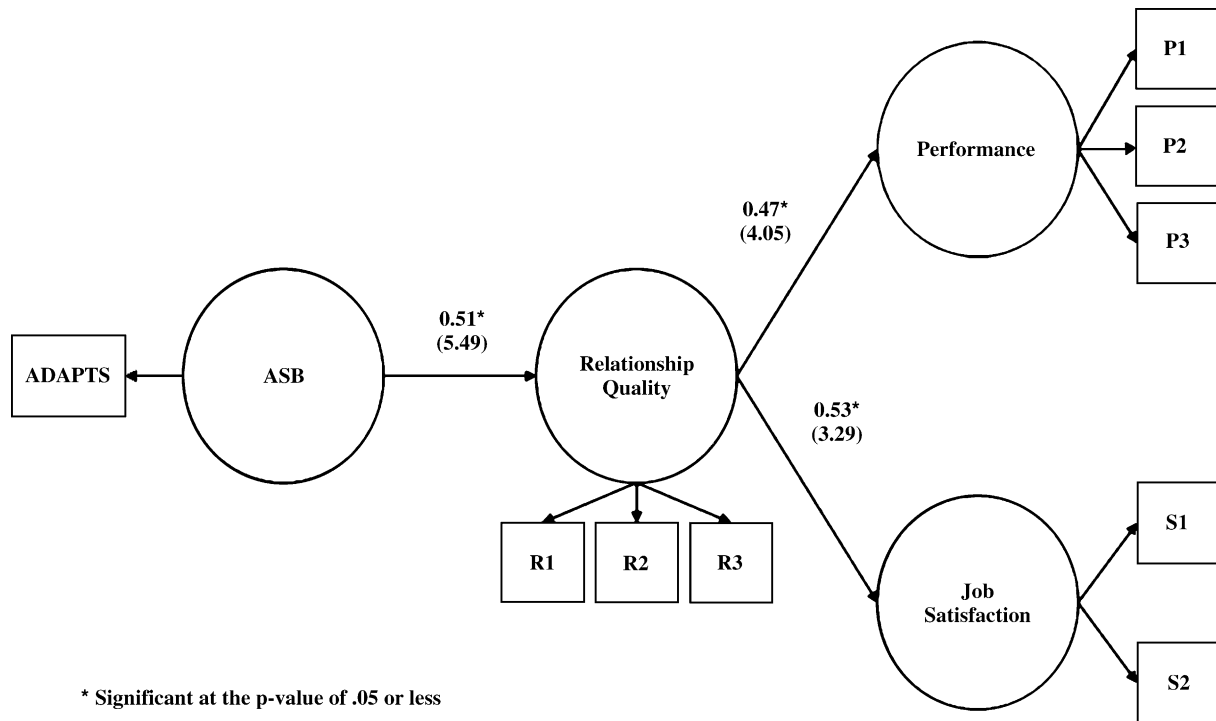


Fig. 2. Model test results.

The comparison of the strengths of indirect and direct effects would give further insights about the relationships. The total effect of ASB on performance is 0.67, with an indirect effect of 0.26 and a direct effect of 0.41. For job satisfaction, the total effect of ASB is 0.68 with an indirect effect of 0.16 and a direct effect of 0.52. In summary, the direct paths ASB-performance and ASB-job satisfaction remain significant in the presence of working relationship quality, indicating that working relationship quality partially mediates the hypothesized relationships.

5. Discussion

The failure to take cultural differences between countries into account has been the cause of many business failures (Ricks, 2003). Furthermore, ignoring the potential influence of a contextual factor that is as pervasive as national culture diminishes the normative value of much marketing theory. For example, critics note that several well-known marketing theories and approaches such as cognitive dissonance, attribution theory, preference modeling, and individual choice modeling may not apply to collectivist societies without modification (Iyengar and Lepper, 1999). Thus, Deshpande et al. (2000) note “a growing recognition that globalization of markets has created the need for cross-cultural testing and cross-national generalization of hypotheses about marketing in general and marketing management in particular.” Given the extent to which our current understanding of ASB is predisposed to reflect Western values, norms and beliefs (e.g., due to the sample frames

utilized in prior work, the cultural backgrounds of prior researchers and editors, etc.), our study adds to the richness of this research stream and broadens understanding of this phenomenon.

5.1. Implications for sales management and research

The primary objectives of this study were to empirically examine the relationship between ASB and its consequences, as well as to determine the extent to which enhancements to the salesperson’s working relationship quality mediate these relationships. Given the increasing emphasis on relational approaches in marketing and sales as well as the presence of more competitive and international business environments, the adaptive capabilities of firms’ sales forces are increasingly called upon to raise customer consciousness of seller-added value, enhance customer retention levels, and buoy revenue growth. For these reasons, we believe our findings should be of interest to sales management practitioners and scholars.

Before discussing the implications of this study, we first acknowledge a few limitations of our work. First, this research was conducted with a convenience sample from only one company in a single industry. While our sample was drawn purposively, cognizant of our research questions, our findings can certainly be reinforced through additional studies including other firms in multiple industries. Moreover, given the importance of cross-cultural research to the generalizability of marketing knowledge, future work must seek to extend these findings through sales force samples from other countries and industries.

We believe firmly that the efficacy of ASB is a function of the selling situation (e.g., based on customer variety and the significance of the purchase decision) (Eveleth and Morris, 2002) and not national culture. However, national culture is likely to play a role in determining which boundary conditions will influence the achievement of desired ASB outcomes. In collectivist cultures, the effective implementation of ASB within the sales force may depend upon systematic and continuous efforts to gain shared understanding and cooperation with other personnel within the selling function as well as other areas of the organization. To the extent that the sales literature has focused on adaptiveness in sales approaches with customers, it has mainly ignored the need for salesperson adaptiveness in managing relationships internal to the firm. The growing complexity of the selling process in many industries has resulted in greater use of selling teams. Given this phenomenon, we believe that the ability to manage internal relationships is increasingly important to salespeople. However, this skill is likely to be more highly accentuated for organizations embedded within collectivist, uncertainty-avoidant national cultures.

Our results are noteworthy in that they reinforce the presumed, although not consistently demonstrated, link between ASB and sales performance. Furthermore, the strength of this relationship is significant even within a national culture that emphasizes adherence to group norms and the avoidance of ambiguous situations. This finding suggests that adaptive sales practices should be promoted to sales organizations in South Korea, as well as other countries with similar national cultures, as a means of enhancing performance and promoting job satisfaction. Additionally, managers should also note the strong direct and indirect effects of ASB and working relationship quality upon job satisfaction. Given the established links between job satisfaction and sales force retention, managers should consider ongoing strategies that encourage ASB and strengthen coworker relationships. Moreover, these results more generally serve to highlight the notion that encouraging adaptability is a key strategy for eliciting improved performance and minimizing turnover across the organization.

We also believe that this paper makes several meaningful theoretical contributions. In considering adaptive selling practices within a non-Western environment, this research provided us an opportunity to consider how national culture might influence ASB and its outcomes. Specifically, we introduce salesperson working relationship quality as a key variable that aids in driving performance and satisfaction. This finding potentially explains some of the conflicting results from other ASB studies as well as extends prior work that has examined LMX within the sales context. Whereas many sales researchers have elected to narrowly examine working relationship quality by focusing solely on the salesperson–supervisor dyad, this study extends the concept of working relationship, considering the influence of relationships with sales colleagues as well as support staff.

Given the rise of concepts such as relationship selling and the selling team, we suggest that the concept of working relationship quality be extended to include other work relationships, such as with customers, business partners, and firm employees from other functional areas.

A second contribution this paper makes is in reinforcing recent comments regarding the conceptualization and measurement of both ASB and sales performance (e.g., Marks et al., 1996; Chonko et al., 2000; Robinson et al., 2002). The strong fit of our model must be partially credited to the suggestions offered in these studies. Our work addresses measurement issues relating to performance by utilizing actual sales figures provided by management to augment self-reported responses to performance scale items. Additionally, we follow Marks et al. (1996) in operationalizing ASB via items reflecting actual adaptive behaviors. Future ASB researchers would do well to consider these issues in devising their plan of research.

To our knowledge, this study is the first published paper to investigate ASB within an Asian context. Thus, this paper adds weight to claims of cross-cultural generalizability for ASB theory by testing both new and established relationships in a previously unexplored setting. New research should strive to more clearly define the boundaries of ASB by linking it to further outcomes. For example, since adaptive salespeople should be better equipped to handle uncertainty, empirical work linking ASB to role ambiguity and role conflict may prove fruitful. Conversely, the effects of antecedent individual characteristics, such as salesperson personality, as well as organizational factors, like the firm's structure or compensation plan, remain open as compelling research opportunities. Additionally, studies that further clarify the relationship between ASB and culture are needed. Are customers from certain cultures more receptive than others to adaptive sales approaches? Are salespeople from certain cultures more inclined or better suited to practice ASB? Finding answers to these questions has important implications for researchers and practitioners, particularly for those interested in issues related to managing international sales efforts.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is hoped that this research contributes to both academicians and business practitioners by improving our understanding of ASB. By examining outcomes and mediating variable of ASB, this study offers a holistic approach to effective salesperson behavior. It is evident that relationship quality is important and is a key to increase sales performance as well as job satisfaction. Management therefore should encourage the practice of ASB in order to maximize retention and organizational performance. Despite the progress and insights achieved, however, there remains a strong need for future research to build upon these findings and further expand our understanding of this important

research topic. It is believed that such research will offer meaningful implications for research and practice alike.

Appendix A. Measures of all items

ASB (Marks et al., 1996; Spiro and Weitz, 1990) (measured on a seven-point Likert scale with the anchors 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree):

1. I am very flexible in the selling approach I use.
2. I can easily use a wide variety of selling approaches.
3. I do not use a set sales approach.
4. I vary my sales style from situation to situation.
5. I treat all of my buyers pretty much differently.
6. I like to experiment with different sales approaches.
7. I change my approach from one customer to another.

Working relationship quality (DelVecchio, 1998) (measured on a seven-point Likert scale with the anchors 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree):

1. I have been developing a good relationship with my colleague salesperson.
2. I have been developing a good relationship with my team supervisor.
3. I have been developing a good relationship with my team manager.
4. I have been developing a good relationship with my department head.
5. I have been developing a good relationship with service department people.
6. I have been developing a good relationship with human resource department people.

Objective performance (actual average sales numbers from management)

Subjective performance (Behrman and Perreault, 1984; Sujan et al., 1994) (measured on a seven-point Likert scale from 1=needs substantial improvement, 4=average, to 7=outstanding):

1. Producing a high market share for this company in a specific territory.
2. Making sales of those products with the highest profit margins.
3. Generating a high level of dollar sales.
4. Maintaining high level of current customer retention.
5. Finding and developing new customer relationships.

Job satisfaction (Churchill et al., 1976): How satisfied are you with (1=very dissatisfied to 7=very satisfied):

1. Overall job satisfaction.
2. My compensation (salary).
3. Opportunities for advancement.

4. Job security.
5. Company policies.
6. My supervisor overall.
7. My colleague workers overall.

Appendix B. The covariance matrix of indicators

	ASB	S1	S2	R1	R2	R3	P1	P2	P3
ASB	0.547								
S1	0.305	1.743							
S2	0.259	0.444	1.147						
R1	0.235	0.216	0.314	1.297					
R2	0.293	0.260	0.371	0.361	1.592				
R3	0.243	0.248	0.326	0.626	0.647	1.775			
P1	0.361	0.053	0.017	0.399	0.594	0.392	2.606		
P2	0.158	0.044	0.086	0.127	0.364	0.371	1.044	1.305	
P3	0.263	0.280	0.206	0.183	0.332	0.348	0.764	0.845	0.803

ASB: adaptive selling behavior (summed seven items of ADAPTS); S1: overall job satisfaction; S2: satisfaction with detail things; R1: the employee's relationship with colleagues; R2: employee–manager(s) relationship; R3: relationship quality with other supporting departments; P1: objective sales volume; P2: subjective financial performance; P3: subjective customer performance; sample size=199.

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