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**Applying Positive Psychology to Selling Behaviors: A Moderated–Mediation Analysis
Integrating Subjective Well-being, Coping and Organizational Identity**

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Applying Positive Psychology to Selling Behaviors: A Moderated-Mediation Analysis Integrating Subjective Well-being, Coping, and Organizational Identity

1. Introduction

Recent studies have demonstrated that people's strengths need to be nurtured, and positive mindsets encouraged, to improve performance in the workplace. Luthans et al. (2010) indicated that there is an increase in employee performance after a psychological capital intervention. In fact, positivity of employees has also been found to mediate the leader's ability to solve problems (Avey et al., 2011), thus enhancing the performance of the organization. Recently, Gallup's 2015 strengths report – based on a study of more than 50,000 business units and 1 million employees – revealed that when positivity was leveraged, business units increased performance by about 7 percent, customer engagement was enhanced by 15 percent, and profit grew by 29 percent. Furthermore, while exploring the neuroscientific implications related to psychological capital, Peterson and colleagues (2008) stated that organizations will receive approval from Wall Street if they realize that a happy workforce is a productive workforce.

Centering on positive human functioning and flourishing, positive psychology deals with three important aspects of happiness and life satisfaction: *positive emotions, positive traits, and positive institutions* (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Friend et al. (2016) stated that a greater focus on positively valenced variables is required in the sales domain as it helps to foster appropriate attitudes, behaviors and performance from salespeople. Further, such efforts help organizations to offset sales turnover and help grow cross-functional sales and enrich customer relations. Despite such significant findings, positive psychology has not adequately explored the sales domain, where performance improvement is of significant importance.

Our paper responds to this call and explores three constructs, parallel to the three key areas of positive psychology, to cultivate salesperson creativity and adaptive selling: *subjective well-being (SWB), positive coping, and organizational identity (OI)*. SWB depicts an individual's happiness and life satisfaction. Specifically, SWB reveals the self-described state of an individual in three areas: high positive affect, low negative affect, and overall life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2009). Among these three areas, life satisfaction is the constant element of SWB and tends to be stable over time. Positive coping is a positive trait focusing on purposeful problem-solving through rational and thoughtful efforts to help salespeople manage stressful situations (Strutton & Lumpkin, 1993). Finally, OI highlights salespeople's positive affiliation with the institution, which provides social support to guide salespeople's selling behaviors.

Broaden-and-build theory, proposed by Fredrickson (2001), posits that positive emotions and states can broaden affective and cognitive processes in individuals and enhance individual behaviors and performance. Bakker (2008) noted that broaden-and-build theory provides a useful framework by which to understand individuals' generative behaviors in the workplace. Recent studies have extended application of this theory to sales organizations. For example, Sridhar and Lyngdoh (2017) showed how salespeople, when in flow (a positive psychology construct), build positive emotions that help them in sharing appropriate information with customers and thus exhibiting ethical behavior. Similarly, Lussier and Hartmann (2017) found that psychological resourcefulness builds positive emotions, thereby helping to broaden salespeople's customer-oriented behaviors and in turn moderating the relationship between psychological

resourcefulness, and sales performance and customer satisfaction. Thus, broaden-and-build theory can help us to better understand how salespeople expand their reach to adapt, develop creativity, and cope with stress.

Applying positive psychology to positive selling behaviors (i.e., sales creativity and adaptive selling), this study intends to answer three research questions (RQs).

RQ1 is “Do salespeople achieve higher levels of adaptive selling, sales creativity and positive coping with higher levels of SWB?” Adaptive and creative selling influence sales performance (Verbeke et al., 2011) and require salespeople to be sensitive to customer needs (Roman & Iacobucci, 2010). We suggest that SWB is the internal driving force that broadens and builds positive behaviors. Therefore, we propose that when in a positive state such as SWB, salespeople’s cognitive and affective processes will help them better cope with stress, and be more adaptive and creative.

RQ2 is “Does positive coping mediate the relationship between SWB and positive selling behaviors?” When in a state of SWB, individuals tend to be more effective in their coping behavior as they are better able to resist stress and crises (Tugade et al., 2004; Frisch, 2000). Furthermore, salespeople that use positive coping strategies are usually able to deflect stressors and actively seek innovative ways to resolve problems (Liu et al., 2016). Hence, we propose that coping behavior acts as a mediator of SWB and adaptive selling, and SWB and sales creativity.

Nearly three decades of studies supporting the role of adaptive and creative selling for better sales effectiveness and performance have pointed to a strategic intersection and synergy between salespeople’s internal qualities, relational skills, and professional knowledge (Giacobbe et al., 2006; Sujana et al., 1994; Spiro & Weitz, 1990), and their sense of external identification with the sales organization (Schwepker & Good, 2012; Thakor & Joshi, 2005). Accordingly, for the preferred selling skills and strategies to be genuine, effective, and enduring, salespeople’s adaptive selling and sales creativity, as well as their success, may require a positive and productive integration between their subjective *inner* state of well-being and their *external* purpose from identification with the organization’s value and support systems.

OI provides salespeople with social support to cope with stress and helps guide their work-related behaviors (Coelho & Augusto, 2010). The study of identity comes from the rediscovery of emotion at the work place (Albert et al. 2000) In the context of sales, as OI is internalized, salespeople become connected to the organization emotionally. They then start to appreciate the benefits of OI and develop positive emotions toward the organization. However, since OI can be manipulated externally by sales organizations as a control mechanism (Coelho & Augusto, 2010), we suggest that different levels of OI may affect the impact of SWB and coping on salespeople’s positive selling behaviors differently. Hence, RQ3 is “Does OI moderate the mediated relationships as proposed in RQ2?”

This study makes several contributions to the sales literature. First, we apply informative research from positive psychology to positive selling behavior. To the best of our knowledge, this study is among the first few to integrate positive psychology and sales literature. Second, we develop a model to examine the effects of SWB, positive coping, and OI on sales creativity and

adaptive selling (see Figure 1). Third, we explore the moderated-mediation relationship of OI on positive selling behavior. To this end, we simultaneously evaluate the inner purpose of SWB and the external influence of OI on salespeople's creativity and adaptive selling.

-----Insert Figure 1 about here -----

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Broaden-and-build theory

Positive psychology studies how humans express and deal with positive and negative emotions. To explain the consequences of these emotions, Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory posits that positive emotions can broaden both affective and cognitive processes, which in turn enhance individual behaviors. Specifically, an individual's positive emotions tend to initiate a cycle of more positive emotions, and increase resilience and life satisfaction (Cohn et al., 2009). By contrast, negative emotions tend to produce more negative emotions, biases towards negative information (Matthews & MacLeod, 2002), myopia (Mogg et al., 2000), and emotional vulnerability to subsequent negative stimuli (Eldar et al., 2008).

The theory also proposes that certain positive emotions reinforce and inspire action and behavioral change. This in turn enhances personal characteristics, such as skills, capabilities, resources, and creativity. Specifically, Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) found that the flexibility cultivated by positive emotions helps individuals develop repertoires on which to build relationships (Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006). Related studies have shown that positive emotions enhance problem-solving, long-term memory, and productivity through expansive information integration (Talarico et al., 2009; Wadlinger & Issacowitz, 2006; Isen et al., 1991). Additionally, heightened positive emotions generate patterns of thought that are adaptable, creative, receptive, and integrative (Isen, 1999). By cultivating positive emotions, people can better accept feedback and criticism (Raghunathan & Trope, 2002) and solve problems (Kahn & Isen, 1993). Similarly, Frisch (2000) noted that individuals who are happier and more satisfied with life tend to be more resilient to stress, better at problem-solving, and have higher job performance.

2.2 Subjective well-being

SWB is a well-established construct in the psychology and organizational literature, with more than three decades of published research. In general, SWB is an individual's self-described state of happiness and is often viewed as the individual's evaluation of his/her quality of life. SWB includes three dimensions: (1) frequent positive emotions, (2) infrequent negative emotions, and (3) high global judgments of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2009). Referred to as a "state of happiness", SWB represents an individual's cognitive and affective evaluations of life satisfaction (Diener, 2012). While emotional assessment is based on feelings, cognitive assessment is based on individuals' evaluation of their life as a whole. Most researchers agree that life satisfaction is the constant element of SWB and tends to be stable over time (Diener et al., 2006).

Overall, SWB serves as a supporting factor to promote positive outcomes. For example, SWB helps people interpret life experiences and stress more positively (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), engage in activities (Dolan et al., 2008), remain supportive to co-workers (George & Brief, 1992), improve their job performance (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001), and earn higher

incomes (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). According to Veenhoven (2008), SWB broadens individuals' horizons and enables them to build more resources. Thus, SWB helps to explain why individuals perform well despite the prevalence of life stressors.

2.3 Hypotheses development for SWB

2.3.1 Main effect – SWB and adaptive selling

Adaptive selling is a central philosophy within sales (Porter et al., 2003), and represents critical behavior for salespeople to be successful (Verbeke et al., 2011). According to Weitz and colleagues (1986), adaptive selling involves altering selling behaviors during customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the situation. The goal is to ensure that interactions with customers are positive, engaging, and meaningful. Adaptive selling has been found to outweigh the costs of information seeking and responding to several contexts of selling (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). At times, even simple adaptations, such as reactions to questions and changes in body language, can improve rapport and reduce objections (Roman & Iacobucci, 2010).

From the perspective of broaden-and-build theory, positive states of SWB expand a salesperson's thought patterns and enhance his/her adaptive and integrative mechanisms (Fredrickson, 2001). Individuals achieve positive states such as SWB by retaining positive emotions, and subsequently achieving positive work outcomes (Davies et al., 1998). When salespeople are aware of their emotions they can identify and understand them better, and are thus able to manage themselves better (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Emotions facilitate cognition and help salespeople prioritize their thinking and assess the situation (Zeidner et al., 2009). Salespeople who can generate positive emotions tend to think rationally and view challenging situations as something they can influence and act upon (Tenney et al., 2015), thereby enabling them to experiment with different sales approaches to ensure positive interactions with various customers.

SWB also positively influences job satisfaction (Kantak et al., 1992), which, in turn, positively influences adaptive selling behaviors (Park & Deitz, 2006). Thus, salespeople with higher (lower) levels of SWB are more (less) likely to adapt their selling approaches to customer requirements. Hence, we expect the following:

***H1:** SWB has a positive effect on adaptive selling behaviors. As such, salespeople with higher levels of SWB tend to exhibit more adaptive selling behaviors.*

2.3.2 Main effect – SWB and sales creativity

As per the componential theory proposed by Amabile (1997), creativity increases when an individual's skills overlap with their key interests. This is because the three components of an individual's creativity – viz., expertise, creative thinking skills, and intrinsic motivation – are at a higher level when the individual is in a positive state such as SWB. In addition, when an individual is in a higher state of SWB, his/her expertise and ability will help him/her solve problems in more innovative ways (Gasper, 2003). Broadly, a salesperson's creativity lies in his/her ability to identify problems, generate and evaluate new solutions to old problems, see old problems from new dimensions or perspectives, and redefine the problems and solve them (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004).

In an organizational setting, when employees have high levels of well-being they develop better cognitive flexibility (Carver, 2003). Such cognitive abilities, in terms of identifying customer problems and assessing potential solutions through creativity, lead to successful results (Evens et al., 2012). Enhanced creativity thus leads to better performance (Kaplan et al., 2009; Diener, 2000, p. 41).

Davis (2009) and Bass et al. (2008) concluded in their meta-analyses that positive states and moods help enhance creativity. In the context of sales, Rego et al. (2014) suggested that positive states and positive affect improve creativity. Creativity facilitates salespeople to develop relevant, useful, and actionable ideas to solve problems. It also enables them to apply their divergent thinking skills to improve the selling process and enrich relationships (Sasser & Koslow, 2008). Prior sales research has shown that salesperson characteristics such as emotional intelligence (Lassk & Shepherd, 2013), intrinsic motivation, and knowledge (Agnihotri et al., 2014) improve sales creativity. In addition, organization-related factors such as positive work relationships (Coelho et al., 2011) and market orientation (Wang & Miao, 2015) have positive effects on salesforce creativity.

Although sales creativity is an integral part of selling, salespeople may strive to sustain sales creativity when faced with failures and setbacks. Attribution theory suggests that when individuals are in a state of well-being, failures are often considered as temporary setbacks caused by situations (Forgas, 1999). As such, compared to those with low SWB, individuals with high SWB tend to interpret difficult situations as less threatening and are more likely to have higher creativity (Seidlitz et al., 1997). Similarly, Tierney and Farmer (2011) found that individuals' creative performances increase as their self-efficacy in creativity grows. Under this circumstance SWB serves as a resource, providing a sense of security and allowing salespeople to learn more freely, and thereby generating more creative results (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). As a result, SWB broadens salespeople's problem-solving approaches, resulting in diverse, exploratory, and novel resolutions (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Thus, we postulate that salespeople with high levels of SWB are more creative in their selling approaches compared to those with low levels of SWB. Hence:

***H2:** SWB has a positive effect on sales creativity, such that salespeople with higher levels of SWB tend to have higher levels of sales creativity compared to those with lower levels of SWB.*

2.3.3 Main effect – SWB and salesperson coping

Salesperson coping is defined as a salesperson's efforts to manage the psychological demands of an environment that is straining their personal resources (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Positive coping focuses on purposeful problem-solving through rational and thoughtful efforts to resolve the situation that is causing stress (both physical and emotional) (Strutton et al., 1993; Strutton & Lumpkin, 1993). Prior research in sales has found that positive-coping salespeople are more likely to deflect the stressor and actively seek innovative ways to resolve problems (Liu et al., 2016), as well as experiencing less emotional exhaustion and higher performance (Lewin & Sager, 2007).

Literature in positive psychology has consistently identified SWB as a critical resource to help individuals effectively cope with stress. Prior studies have shown that people with high levels of life satisfaction are more resistant to stress (Frisch, 2000), and that SWB enables them to effectively cope with challenges and emerge from crises (Tugade et al., 2004). Specifically, Fredrickson and colleagues (2003) found that positive emotions improve coping mechanisms and buffer individuals against stress. Positive emotions serve a homeostatic role by “undoing” the lingering effects of stress, thereby returning the individual to cardiovascular equilibrium (Fredrickson et al., 2000). Similarly, Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) suggested that an individual’s autonomic nervous system is at ease when they are in a higher state of well-being. The authors also postulated that positive states enable individuals to be at ease, and thus to better manage stress.

Additionally, Heintzman and Mannell (2003) noted that people with greater positive states are more enthusiastic and energetic toward life, more open to new experiences, and more likely to achieve effective coping outcomes through optimistic thinking. Likewise, Lyubomirsky and colleagues (2005) documented that SWB boosts positive attitudes and broadens the repositories of coping mechanisms in the workplace. As such, SWB enables salespeople to broaden positive thought–action repertoires, mitigate challenges, and cope with situations more effectively. Thus:

***H3:** SWB has a positive effect on salesperson coping behavior, such that salespeople with higher levels of SWB tend to have higher levels of coping behavior compared to those with lower levels of SWB.*

2.4 Hypothesis development for mediation and moderation

2.4.1 Mediation of salesperson coping

Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) suggested that as positive, problem-focused coping mechanism becomes stronger, individuals tend to feel less stressed and more optimistic, and are better able to adapt to situations. Sales literature has provided evidence that positive coping enables salespeople to be more flexible and adaptable in their selling approaches (Liu et al., 2016; Sujana et al., 1994). Additionally, Lewin and Sager (2009, 2007) showed that salespeople with high levels of positive coping experience less emotional exhaustion and achieve higher performance. Therefore, we propose that positive coping will facilitate salespeople’s adaptive selling approach. Combined with Hypothesis 3 (i.e., SWB has a positive effect on coping), we further suggest a mediating role of positive coping as follows:

***H4:** Salespeople’s coping behavior positively mediates the relationship between SWB and adaptive selling behaviors, such that salespeople with higher levels of coping behavior tend to have higher levels of adaptive selling behavior compared to those with lower levels of coping behavior.*

By the same token, positive coping improves salespeople’s creativity. Salespeople’s increased ability to cope with challenges promotes a sense of confidence and security, and subsequently facilitates their ability to explore innovative ideas, expands their problem-solving ability (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005), and enhances their creativity (Fredrickson, 2001). Liu and colleagues (2016) also found that problem-focused coping empowers salespeople with creative

solutions to rectify problems. Accordingly, we propose that salesperson coping will enhance his/her sales creativity. Again, linking with Hypothesis 3 (i.e., positive effect of SWB on coping), we further suggest a mediating role of positive coping as follows:

H5: Salespeople's coping behavior mediates the relationship between SWB and sales creativity, such that salespeople with higher levels of coping behavior tend to have higher levels of sales creativity compared to those with lower levels of coping behavior.

2.4.2 Moderation by organizational identity

Derived from social identity theory, OI refers to individuals' degree of identification with a particular social group, and thus determines their willingness to behave as members of that group (Olkkonen & Lipponen, 2006). Research has shown that OI heightens members' association with the organization as central and distinctive (Gioia & Thomas, 1996), and embodies their self-concepts, abilities, and approaches towards work (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Specifically, Turner and colleagues (1987) noted that OI enables members to define themselves in social environments, and thereby regulate their attitudes and behaviors toward the organization and toward others.

When consistent with employees' core values, OI often guides their behaviors (Turner, 1982) and propels them to embrace organizational and customer expectations (Olkkonen & Lipponen, 2006). He and Brown (2013) stated that organizational members' willingness to partake in important activities depends on the saliency of OI. Similarly, Bell and Menguc (2002) showed that salespeople who identify with their organizations are more likely to engage in activities and behaviors that benefit the organization. Additionally, sales research has shown that a higher level of identification with the organization enables salespeople to enact desired behaviors in the workplace (De Coninck, 2011), embrace behavioral change (Briggs et al., 2012), and improve customer orientation (Thakor & Joshi, 2005).

Literature in social identity theory has noted that individuals' group membership, or OI, positively affects their cognitive coping process and buffers against organizational stressors (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Likewise, Park and Folkman (1997) suggested that OI can serve as a resource to help salespeople develop self-efficacy to manage stressful situations more effectively.

While SWB focuses on salespeople's inner purpose and life satisfaction, OI highlights their affiliation with the sales organization, giving rise to their external purpose and value. In other words, OI provides salespeople with social support to cope with stress and helps guide their work-related behaviors. Although OI can be manipulated by organizations as a control mechanism, research has suggested that higher levels of OI help to induce individuals' sense of worthiness; facilitate positive work outcomes, such as job satisfaction, commitment, and accomplishment (Wegge et al., 2006); and enhance creativity in customer interactions (Coelho & Augusto, 2010).

Based on the abovementioned studies, we suggest that higher OI amplifies the positive effect of coping on selling behaviors, while lower OI lessens the effect. Taking into account Hypotheses 4 and 5, salesperson coping and its behavioral consequences (i.e., H4: positive

coping → adaptive selling behavior; H5: positive coping → sales creativity), we propose a moderating role of OI, in that the more salespeople identify with their organization, the more likely it is that their positive coping skills will enhance their adaptive selling behavior and sales creativity. Hence:

H6a: OI positively moderates the relationship between salespeople's coping and adaptive selling behaviors, such that the positive effect of coping on adaptive selling is enhanced for salespeople with high OI, and mitigated for salespeople with low OI.

H6b: OI positively moderates the relationship between salesperson coping and sales creativity, such that the positive effect of coping on sales creativity is enhanced for salespeople with high OI, and mitigated for salespeople with low OI.

In the examination of Hypotheses 6a and 6b, it is possible that OI may further enhance the mediating role of salesperson coping on the relationship between (1) SWB and adaptive selling, and (2) SWB and sales creativity. Prior research has suggested that OI helps individuals to acquire and develop realistic perspectives about themselves (Sheeran et al., 1995), and this realistic self-assessment may help strengthen the influence of SWB on positive coping and positive selling behaviors (Festinger, 1954). Therefore, we suggest that higher OI may heighten the indirect effect of SWB on positive selling behaviors through salesperson coping, while low OI may weaken the indirect effect. Therefore, we propose moderated mediation hypotheses as follows:

H6c: OI positively moderates the strength of the mediated relationship between SWB and adaptive selling through salesperson coping, such that the mediated relationship is stronger under high OI than under low OI.

H6d: OI positively moderates the strength of the mediated relationship between SWB and sales creativity through salesperson coping, such that the mediated relationship is stronger under high OI than under low OI.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample and data collection procedure

To test our hypotheses, we collected data using a self-administered questionnaire to survey sales professionals. We initially contacted senior human resource (HR) executives of several organizations via email and explained the intent of the study in order to gain permission to contact their sales managers and salespeople. We provided a brief summary of the motivation for the study and requested their assistance. All the companies' HR executives were known to some of the authors of this paper, which helped with acceptance. Data collection efforts were facilitated by the active support of the HR department. The researchers visited the organizations and personally distributed the questionnaire to salespeople, along with a cover letter that explained the intent of study and assured the confidentiality of their responses. All questionnaires were in English.

To ensure the appropriateness of the sample, we verified that the sales executives were engaged in selling activities and performed duties as described by Marshall et al. (1999).

Respondents were sales professionals of multinational companies located in India in a variety of B2C market settings, including consumer goods and services. Salespeople in these organizations interact and sell directly to customers, and their compensation plans include a monthly salary, plus commission based on their sales performance. Given that the competition has grown significantly in B2C transactions, and that the technology has rapidly changed business cycles, creativity of the B2C salesforce is critical and being able to adapt to the new reality will help salespeople to achieve results (Baldauf & Cravens, 2002). In addition, salespeople who can be creative about the usage of their products and can persuade their customers through adaptive selling tend to be more productive (Martinaitye and Sacramento, 2013).

Following our initial contact, a total of 342 out of 427 surveys were returned. Among these, 334 were fully completed, resulting in a 78% effective response rate. Of respondents, 74.6% were male and 73.9% had a graduate or post-graduate degree. The respondents had an average of 2.06 years of sales experience. Table 1 presents the sample characteristics. The final sample includes companies operating in a range of industries, including insurance, pharmaceutical, automobile, and retail. The size of the salesforce in the organization ranged from 15 to 300 people. Non-response bias was assessed by comparing the mean responses on key constructs from early vs. late respondents. No significant differences were found in any of the constructs.

Insert Table 1 about here

3.2 Measures

Items for the constructs were developed from established scales adapted to the sales context. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 7 strongly agree. The scales used for the study included the eight-item flourishing scale (Diener et al., 2009) to measure SWB; six-item salesperson coping scale (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984;); five-item adaptive selling scale (Spiro & Weitz, 1990); and eight-item sales creativity scale (Zhou & George, 2001). Similar to Thakor and Joshi's (2005) study, we adopted seven items from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire to measure OI (Mowday et al., 1979). Table 2 lists the measurement items, factor loadings, and reliability results of the constructs.

Insert Table 2 about here

4. Analysis and Results

To assess the psychometric properties of the focal constructs and to test the measurement model, PLS-SEM was applied using Smart PLS software. A conditional process (i.e., moderated mediation) was performed on the data using PROCESS in SPSS 20, as also recommended by Hayes (2013). The conditional process was shown to render better power compared to the widely

used Sobel test to identify the significance of indirect effects (Hair et al., 2014). It generated fairly accurate predictive validity results (Hayes, 2009), and allowed for testing moderation and mediation paths simultaneously, without normality data assumptions (Hair et al., 2014). As such, we first tested for the mediation effect of salesperson coping on SWB and adaptive selling, and on SWB and sales creativity. Then, the moderation effect using OI was tested on the mediated relationships. Finally, we tested the conditional process – i.e., moderated mediation – on the variables, as represented in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

4.1 Scale evaluations

The measurement model analysis using Smart PLS to assess the validity and reliability of the measures achieved a good fit (see Table 2). Two items from the SWB scale and one item from the OI scale were deleted due to low standardized factor loadings. The average variance extracted for all constructs was above the 0.5 threshold, thus supporting convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The constructs demonstrated adequate reliability, with composite reliability indices ranging from 0.84 to 0.91. Discriminant validity was also supported, as the heterotrait–monotrait values were below the threshold value of 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). Common method bias was not a concern, since estimation of a single latent factor using all scale items as indicators showed no highly correlated variables. Descriptive statistics for the constructs used in this study are given in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

4.2 Hypotheses testing

4.2.1 Main effects

The direct effects (i.e., H1 to H3) were tested using the simple mediation model (model 4, as suggested by Hayes [2013]) in PROCESS. Average values of the total item scores represented the constructs. SWB was found to have a significant, positive, and direct influence on adaptive selling (H1: $b = 0.236$, $p = 0.000$), sales creativity (H2: $b = 0.501$, $p = 0.000$), and salesperson coping (H3: $b = 0.777$, $p = 0.000$). Thus, H1, H2, and H3 are accepted (see Table 4).

Insert Table 4 about here

4.2.2 Mediation effects

The indirect effect of SWB on adaptive selling via salesperson coping was based on 10,000 bootstrap samples estimated with a 95% CI (as suggested by Hayes [2013]). SWB was found to be a significant predictor of salesperson coping ($b = 0.777$, $p = 0.000$), and salesperson

coping was a significant predictor of adaptive selling (H4: $b = 0.521, p = 0.000$). Approximately 45% of the variance in adaptive selling was accounted for by the predictors ($R^2 = 0.451$). The results indicated that the indirect coefficient was significant ($b = 0.4057, SE = 0.054, 95\% CI = 0.3056-0.5160$). Similarly, the results showed that SWB was a significant predictor of salesperson coping ($b = 0.777, p = 0.000$), and salesperson coping was a significant predictor of sales creativity (H5: $b = 0.236, p = 0.000$). Approximately 42% of the variance in sales creativity was accounted for by the predictors ($R^2 = 0.423$). The results indicated that the indirect coefficient was significant ($b = 0.183, SE = 0.052, 95\% CI = 0.0903-0.2949$). The indirect effects were also significant at $p < 0.05$, as no zero was included in the 95% CI (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Hence, H4 and H5 are supported (see Table 5).

Insert Table 5 about here

4.2.3 Moderation effects

Our results indicate that salesperson coping was associated with both adaptive selling ($b = 1.26, p = 0.000$) and sales creativity ($b = 1.13, p = 0.000$). Additionally, the moderating effect of OI on the relationship between salesperson coping and adaptive selling showed significant negative interaction effects, with (1) salesperson coping and OI on adaptive selling $b = -0.152, p = 0.000$, and (2) salesperson coping and OI on sales creativity $b = -0.169, p = 0.000$. As such, simple slope graphs (low [-1 SD] vs. high [+1 SD] levels of OI) displayed the association between salesperson coping and adaptive selling, as well as salesperson coping and sales creativity. The graphs shown in Figures 2 and 3 indicate a significant negative association between OI and adaptive selling, and between OI and sales creativity.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Insert Figure 3 about here

The results show amplified direct positive effects of salesperson coping on adaptive selling, and on sales creativity for salespeople with low OI. Meanwhile, for salespeople with higher OI, the direct effects of salesperson coping on adaptive selling and on sales creativity decreased. Since the outcomes of the moderation analyses revealed negative significant interactions, H6a and H6b were not supported (see Table 6).

Insert Table 6 about here

4.2.4 Moderated mediating effects

With evidence that the effects of salesperson coping on adaptive selling and on sales creativity are moderated by OI, the conditional indirect effect at different values of the moderator OI was examined. Given that the mediating effects of salesperson coping vary at different values of OI, the conditional process calculates the path effects in the form of a confidence interval; any confidence interval that excludes 0 is evidence of a moderation effect. Moderated mediation is present when there is evidence of moderation at some level of mediation. The results show that while the mediating effect of salesperson coping on the relationship between SWB and adaptive selling was significant, the positive effect of salesperson coping on adaptive selling diminished significantly at higher levels of OI. Similarly, the positive effect of salesperson coping on sales creativity was lower at higher levels of OI. Tables 7 and 8 show that as the value of OI increased, the effect of salesperson coping decreased, with the weakest effect at -1 standard deviation for OI. As such, there was a significant negative interaction of OI in the mediation model. Hence, H6c and H6d were not supported.

Insert Table 7 about here

Insert Table 8 about here

In conclusion, consistent with our hypotheses, salesperson coping *mediates* the relationships between (1) SWB and adaptive selling, and (2) SWB and sales creativity. Additionally, OI interacts with salesperson coping to *moderate* the relationship between (1) salesperson coping and adaptive selling, and (2) salesperson coping and sales creativity. However, the moderated mediation effects are in the opposite direction. Specifically, at higher levels of OI, salesperson coping has a weakened effect on the influence of SWB on adaptive selling and sales creativity. Meanwhile, at lower levels of OI, salesperson coping has a significant positive effect on the relationship between SWB and adaptive selling and sales creativity. Although contrary to our moderated mediation hypotheses developed from broaden and build theory, these findings provide some insights into the ceiling effect of OI.

5. Discussion and Implications

This paper is among the first few to have applied positive psychology constructs and theories in the field of sales. We chose this approach as we observed that the traditional reductionist and skeptical view employed in the sales domain tend to view reality from only one perspective. Sheldon and King (2001) observed that clinical psychologists often focus on pathologies, ignoring the nature of psychological health, while social cognitive psychologists are subject to bias, and evolutionary psychologists focus on selfishness, further elaborating negative identification found across psychology. According to Seligman (1998), this exclusive attention to pathology neglects the individual's well-being and flourishing. Similar biases have also been observed in the sales literature. Verbeke et al.'s (2011) seminal meta-analysis showed that the

majority of variables shown to influence sales performance have been reductionist in nature (e.g., role conflict, role overload, burnout), with hardly any positive psychological constructs.

Research has shown that positive psychology theories are more adaptive and tend to take an optimistic viewpoint (Sheldon & King, 2001). For example, Fredrickson et al. (2008) found success in enhancing individuals' well-being through positive interventions (such as meditation, progress discussions, and work–life balance), and the enhanced well-being further broadened and built their social relationships, health, and life purpose. Similarly, Isen et al. (1987) showed that positive emotions foster flexibility in thinking and help individuals adapt to the environment. Such adaptability translates into a greater repertoire of action plans (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), and may help salespeople to expand their perspectives to creative options for problem-solving (Kahn & Isen, 1993). The positive state also helps in improving creativity in individuals. Individuals in a positive state would better assimilate and integrate information and build efficiencies in understanding several concepts and phenomenon (Khan & Isen, 1993; Isen et al., 1985, 1987, 1991).

Fredrickson's (2013) broaden and build theory helps to explain why individuals might be receptive to newer experiences and embrace feedback. A wide variety of positive emotions, including joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love, can help individuals to broaden and build a repertoire of skills (Fredrickson, 2013). Broaden and build theory has been applied in several contexts, such as to help explain the protective role of compassion satisfaction (a positive emotion) for therapists working with survivors of sexual abuse (Samios, et al., 2013), to develop better outcomes for socially deprived children in orphanages (Ghera et al., 2009), to improve child development and emotional resilience via interventions of maternal positive expressions (Conway and Macdonough, 2006), and to improve self-acceptance, health, competence, sense of purpose, and relationships with others (Fredrickson, et al. 2008).

Broaden and build theory explains when and why individuals might consider adapting to a context and/or creatively solving a problem. Hence, we use this theory to explain the relationships among SWB, coping, OI, adaptive selling, and sales creativity. SWB is a positive construct, and hence can aid in human flourishing and individual growth, as per broaden and build theory. Furthermore, such positivity helps individuals when dealing with difficult situations (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

Aggressive competition and demanding customers are making the sales ecosystem increasingly competitive (Davies & Elliott, 2006), and salespeople have to cope with the challenges that arise from this (Lewin & Sager, 2009). This study shows that SWB broadens and builds salespeople's coping mechanisms and selling behaviors. Overall, we believe that broaden and build theory may provide theoretical support to enable sales management to refocus on "positive intelligence" (Chamine, 2012), instead of negative traits.

In the current study, we consider the positive psychology constructs as being complementary to existing reductionist constructs. Although traditional (remedial) psychology may help salesforces rise to challenges, little research has explored how salespeople may flourish – despite the evidence regarding positive psychology constructs and their direct effects on

performance (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). We thus considered positive psychology constructs as relevant to the sales management context.

Results of our study have several implications for sales research and practice. Our findings provide evidence that SWB enhances adaptive selling and sales creativity. By investing in well-being and training programs, sales managers can foster SWB in salespeople and indirectly sustain an adaptive and creative selling environment. Salespeople with a greater sense of life satisfaction are more likely to have greater mental flexibility (Khan & Isen, 1993). Additionally, Rego and colleagues (2012) suggested that salespeople with higher SWB are more optimistic, which often improves their feelings of mastery in adaptability and creativity in selling. Salespeople with higher SWB are more at ease when exploring innovative ideas to build trust and loyalty with customers, and therefore serve as consultative sellers (Liu & Leach, 2001). Overall, this study provides evidence that enhancing salespeople's well-being is a good investment in sales performance, such that sales organizations should integrate SWB into the selection, recruitment, and training process.

Fostering SWB among salespeople enables them to focus on their sales goals. Past research has shown that one way to regulate negative affect and enhance life satisfaction is to confront unattainable goals (Wrosch et al., 2003). SWB plays an important role in adaptive self-regulation, which may aid salespeople in moving from unattainable goals toward more valuable and meaningful alternatives. Carver and Scheier (1999) suggested that engagement with valued alternatives may help salespeople cope with higher levels of distress.

Developing positive selling behaviors through SWB may pay off; extant literature has also supported the idea that SWB has a positive influence on attitudes and behaviors (Bindl et al., 2012). SWB improves salespeople's health and immunity, enabling speedier recovery and thereby improving their coping mechanisms. These findings together help to underline the importance of SWB among salespeople, which in turn justifies its consideration when designing and formulating training and wellness programs within sales organizations. In addition, in light of the power of SWB and its broadening effects on coping mechanisms and selling behavior, sales organizations may need to consider investing in programs to build salespeople's positive emotions and life satisfaction reservoir. This may include meaningful sponsorship of programs such as time-off volunteer activities, mindfulness workshops, life coaching, and time-management training.

Organizations can help develop a virtuous cycle of benefits by fostering SWB. Authentic leaders help foster SWB among salespeople to stimulate positive personal growth (Ilees et al. 2005). Salespeople in turn support their co-workers and leaders when in a state of SWB (George & Brief, 1992). Mutual trust can then grow, which can nurture salespeople's sense of identification with their leaders and organizations (Ilees et al., 2005).

The study also provides evidence of the mediating effect of coping on the relationships between SWB and adaptive selling, and SWB and creative selling. The results indicate that the higher a salesperson's SWB, the higher their adaptability, since SWB helps to build coping mechanisms and to stimulate creative thinking, as also observed by Csikszentmihalyi (1996). In critical situations, SWB helps salespeople to build coping mechanisms and creatively solve problems (Groza et al., 2016; Laskk & Shepherd, 2013). Further, the results support what

Fredrickson (2001) called the “moments of truth” link, whereby a positive state evokes more positive states and decreases negative states. An increase in SWB can improve positive selling behaviors in adaptability and creativity and diminish negative effects of challenges by building coping mechanisms. In an effort to develop effective selling behaviors, a salesperson’s positive states may function as efficient antidotes to stress (Fredrickson, 1998), thereby broadening his/her thought actions, and subsequent participative actions. This study thus provides profound insights for enhancing selling behaviors by improving coping mechanisms through SWB, and in turn contributes insights to the ongoing debate on the importance of salespeople’s emotion-based coping mechanisms (Liu et al., 2016; Strutton & Lumpkin, 1994).

As expected, we found OI to be a significant moderator of salesperson coping on adaptive selling and sales creativity. However, a moderated mediation analysis indicated that OI has negative moderation effects. Thus, OI may not always have a positive influence on salespeople’s behaviors (Farrell & Oczkowski 2012). Our findings also reveal that when salespeople identify strongly with their organization, the positive mediating effect of coping diminishes. In other words, for high-OI salespeople, higher levels of coping weaken their adaptive selling and sales creativity. Our findings suggest that sales managers should not focus solely on developing strong organizational affiliation but should instead help salespeople to balance their organizational identity with well-being and participation in positive coping programs.

Contrary to the assumptions of broaden and build theory, higher OI does not seem to help salespeople build enduring personal resources to enrich their adaptive selling skills or sales creativity. Thus, salespeople with higher OI may have a passive attitude and be complacent regarding the status quo, thereby ignoring the need to apply positive coping strategies to improve their selling behaviors. Previous studies in OI have also contended that individuals who strongly identify with their organization may be indifferent to engaging in activities that are beneficial to the organization (Briggs et al., 2012). Our findings support the line of argument that higher OI among salespeople may not compel them to apply coping strategies to improve their adaptive and creative behaviors. In light of this, we would caution sales organizations against overemphasizing OI, as it may inversely affect adaptive and creative behaviors among salespeople.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study has a few limitations. First, since it is a cross-sectional study, causal relationships may need to be further examined through longitudinal data. Second, as the respondents for the study were from the Indian B2C context, the results may be difficult to generalize to other contexts. Future research could explore B2B selling and/or different cultures/countries to replicate our findings. Third, the study followed a positivist paradigm and, in the process, may have lost some insights that post-positivist approaches (mixed or multiple methods) may have brought.

Future research may also look into outcomes of SWB from sales managers’ perspectives. A growing body of literature has investigated sales managers’ role in shaping salesperson behaviors (Ahearne et al., 2013; Flaherty et al., 2012). Exploring the role of sales managers (e.g., characteristics, style) on sales behaviors/performance and on SWB could also be useful.

Although our study indicates the importance of SWB, scholars should further explore conditions under which sales managers may amplify salespeople's SWB.

Future research may also investigate antecedents of SWB, and the interventions needed to improve SWB among salespeople. This may include organizational relational resources, processes, and activities. For example, intervention programs such as job crafting, sales training, quota setting, territory assignment, and salesforce empowerment may help salespeople foster their SWB. Additional explorations into various coping mechanisms and how SWB influences these mechanisms may shed light on their effects on selling behaviors.

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Table 1: Sample Characteristics

N=334

Variables	Percentage
Respondents Characteristics	
Gender	
Male	74.6
Female	25.4
Education	
Post-graduate	26.6
Graduate	47.3
Others- Diploma/Higher Sec	26.1
Total Sales Experience	
Less than 2 years	31.7
2- 5 years	44.3
6-10 years	15.9
More than 10 years	8.1
Age	
Less than 25 years	48.2
25- 35 years	43.4
35-45 years	6.0
More than 45 years	2.4

Table 2
Measurement of Study Constructs

Construct and items	Loadings	α	C.R	AVE
Subjective Well-being (SWB)		.84	.88	.56
<i>I lead a purposeful and meaningful life</i>	.75			
<i>My social relationships are supportive and rewarding</i>	.74			
<i>I am engaged and interested in my daily activities.</i>	.74			
<i>I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others</i>	.78			
<i>I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me</i>	.73			
<i>I am a good person and live a good life</i>	.74			
<i>I am optimistic about my future</i>	deleted			
<i>People respect me</i>	deleted			
Salesperson Coping Behavior		.84	.88	.57
<i>I come up with several alternative solutions to the problem.</i>	.68			
<i>I make a plan and follow it.</i>	.70			
<i>I give my best effort to do what is necessary to solve the problem</i>	.74			
<i>I work on changing policies that caused the situation</i>	.76			
<i>I decide what I think should be done and explain this to the people who are affected</i>	.82			
<i>I try to work more efficiently</i>	.79			
Adaptive Selling		.85	.89	.64
<i>When I feel that my sales approach is not working, I tend to change to another approach.</i>	.66			
<i>I am very flexible in the selling approach I use.</i>	.86			
<i>I like to experiment with different sales approaches</i>	.87			
<i>I tend to use a wide variety of selling approaches.</i>	.79			
<i>I try to understand how one customer differs from another</i>	.79			
Sales creativity		.91	.93	.64
<i>I suggest new ways to achieve goals or objectives.</i>	.79			
<i>I come up with new and practical ideas to improve performance</i>	.83			
<i>I suggest new ways to increase quality.</i>	.81			
<i>I promote and champion ideas to others</i>	.85			
<i>I exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity to.</i>	.78			
<i>I develop adequate plans and schedules for the implementation of new ideas</i>	.80			
<i>I often have new and innovative ideas.</i>	.73			
<i>I come up with creative solutions to problems</i>	.77			
Organizational Identity (OI)		.89	.91	.65
<i>I talk about this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for</i>	.83			
<i>I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar.</i>	.77			
<i>I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization</i>	.83			
<i>I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for, over others I was considering at the time I joined.</i>	.82			
<i>Often, I find it hard to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its employees</i>	deleted			
<i>I really care about the future of this organization</i>	.81			
<i>For me, this is the best of all possible organizations to work for.</i>	.74			

* deleted due to low loading

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Variables

	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4	5
1.SWB	5.82	1.05	.84				
2.Adaptive Selling	5.49	1.29	.516**	.85			
3.Sales Creativity	5.65	1.17	.619**	.693**	.91		
4. Salesperson Coping	5.14	1.26	.651**	.633**	.550**	.84	
5.Organisational Identity (OI)	5.35	1.36	.554**	.461**	.613**	.418**	.83

Notes: Cronbach alpha appear diagonal; significant at * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

HTMT Ratio							
	1	2	3	4	5		
1.SWB		0.639	0.703	0.769	0.636		
2.Adaptive Selling		-	-	-	-		
3.Sales Creativity		-	-	-	-		
4. Salesperson Coping		0.769	0.622	-	-		
5.Organisational Identity (OI)		0.565	0.681	0.484	-		

Table 4
Model Coefficients for the Hypothesized Direct Effects

Consequent										
		Sales-person coping			Adaptive selling			Sales Creativity		
Antecedents	Coefficient	Std error	p	Coefficient	Std error	p	Coefficient	Std error	p	
SWB	.777	.049	.000	.236	.063	.000	.501	.061	.000	
SalespersonCoping		-	-	.521	.053	.000	.236	.051	.000	
	$R^2=0.423$ $F=243, p<0.00$			$R^2=0.451$ $F=135, p<0.00$			$R^2=0.420$ $F=120, p<0.00$			

Table 5
Model Coefficients for the Mediation Effects of Sales Coping

Consequent									
		Sales- person coping		Adaptive selling			Sales Creat- ivity		
Antecedents	Coeffi- cient	Std error	<i>p</i>	Coeffi- cient	Std error	<i>p</i>	Coeffi- cient	Std error	<i>p</i>
SWB	.777	.049	.000	.236	.063	.000	.501	.061	.000
Salesperson Coping	-	-	-	.521	.053	.000	.236	.051	.000
Indirect effect of X on Y via Sales Coping									
	Effect	Boot SE	LLCI - ULCI	Effect	Boot SE	LLCI - ULCI	Effect	Boot SE	LLCI - ULCI
	-	-	-	.4057	.0540	.3056 - .5160	.1837	.052	.0903 - .2949
				R ² =.451 F=135, <i>p</i> <0.00			R ² =0.420 F =120 , <i>p</i> <0.00		
Normal Theory Test				Effect	Std error	Z	Effect	Std error	Z
				.4057	.0490	8.279	.1837	.0415	4.430

Table 6
Model Coefficients for the Moderation Effects of OI

Consequent								
	Adaptive selling				Sales Creativity			
Antecedents	Coeffi- cient	Std error	<i>p</i>	LLCI - ULCI	Coeffi- cient	Std error	<i>p</i>	LLCI - ULCI
Salesperson Coping	1.26	.114	.000	1.038- 1.489	1.13	.104	.000	.9280 - 1.337
Organizational Identity (OI)	.951	.111	.000	.7324 - 1.171	1.18	.101	.000	.9879- .1386
Coping X OI	-.152	.022	.000	-.1972- -.1082	-.169	.020	.000	-.2102- -.1293
Constant	-1.71	.524	.001	-2.747- -.6825	-1.73	.477	.000	-2.670 - -.794
	R ² =0.547 F =133, <i>p</i> <0.00				R ² =0.569 F =145, <i>p</i> <0.00			

Table 7
Conditional Indirect Effects through Salesperson Coping at Different Level of OI for Adaptive Selling

Mediator	Value of Moderator (OI)	Effect	Bootstrap SE	Lower level CI	Upper level CI
Salesperson Coping	3.99	.4997	.0526	.4058	.6144
Salesperson Coping	5.35	.3396	.0503	.2466	.4454
Salesperson Coping	6.71	.1796	.0596	.0713	.3050

Note* Values for moderator are for +/- one SD from the mean, ** signifies a 95% confidence interval for the mediated effect

Table 8
Conditional Indirect Effects through Salesperson Coping at Different Level of OI for Sales Creativity

Mediator	Value of Moderator (OI)	Effect	Bootstrap SE	Lower level CI	Upper level CI
Salesperson Coping	3.99	.2722	.0421	.1943	.3614
Salesperson Coping	5.35	.1076	.0372	.0387	.1865
Salesperson Coping	6.71	-.0570	.0444	-.1436	.0297

Note* Values for moderator are for +/- one SD from the mean, ** signifies a 95% confidence interval for the mediated effect

Figure1
Hypothesised Model with Direct Effects, Mediating and Moderating Relationships

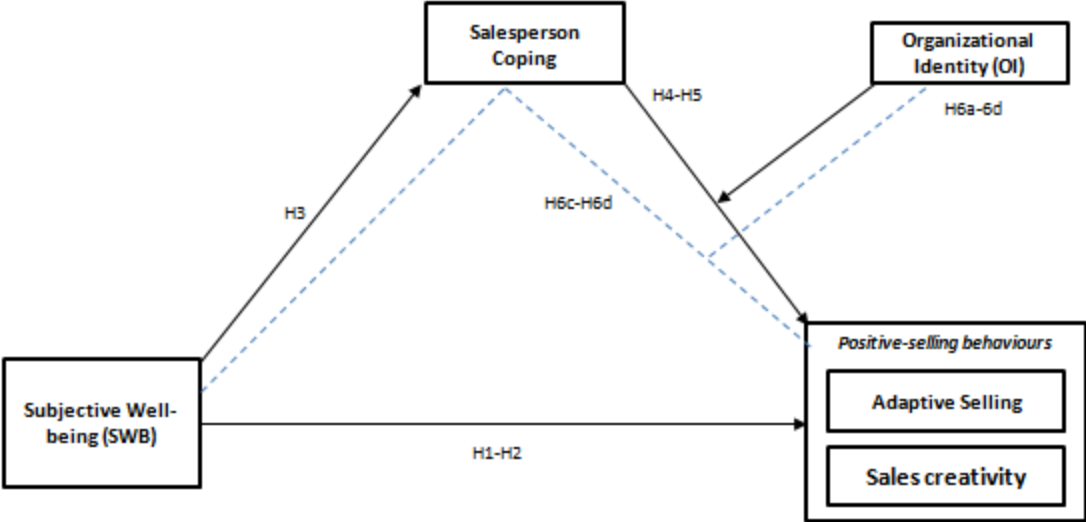


Figure 2
Interactive Effects of Coping and OI on Adaptive Selling

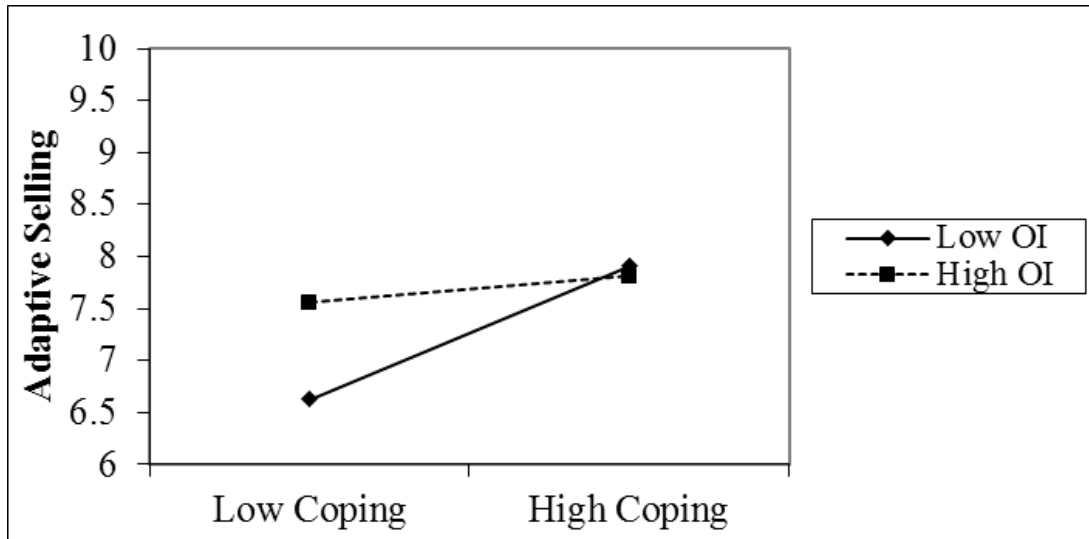
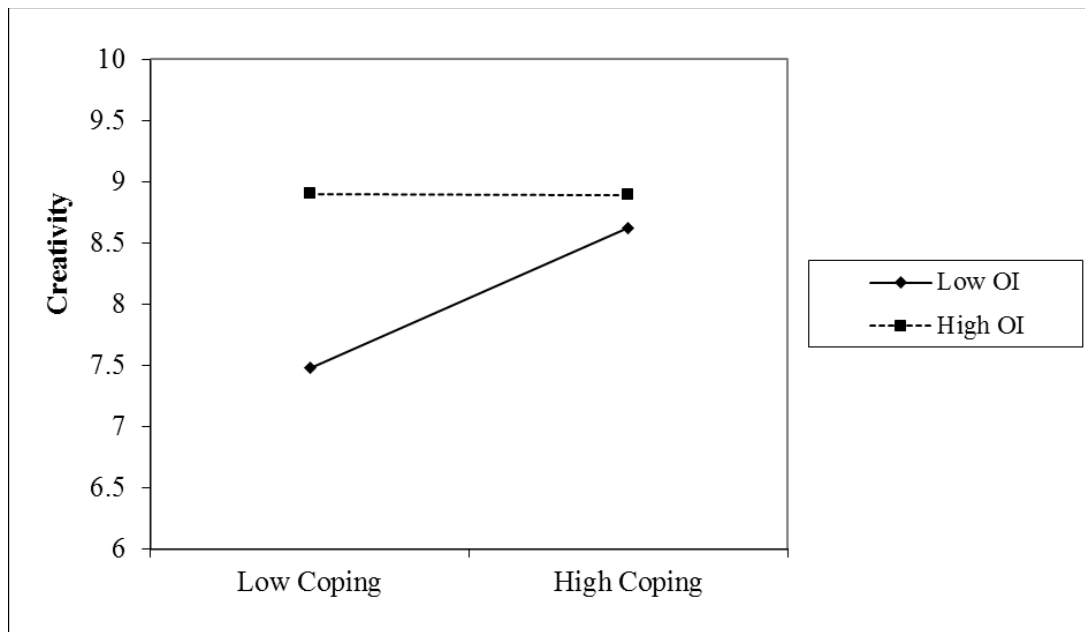


Figure 3
Interactive effects of Coping and OI on Sales Creativity



**Applying Positive Psychology to Selling Behaviors: A Moderated–Mediation Analysis
Integrating Subjective Well-being, Coping and Organizational Identity**

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