The role of self-regulatory mode on acquisition-retention ambidexterity

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Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to develop a theoretical model that posits locomotion-assessment ambidextrous orientation as predictor of salesperson acquisition–retention ambidexterity, which as a consequence increases sales. The authors drawing on regulatory focus theory and self-regulatory for this propose. **Design/methodology/approach:** Salespeople involved in the study represent different firms selling a wide variety of food and household products to a wholesaler, which resells them to supermarket chains. The authors collected data from 231 industrial salespeople. **Findings:** First, salesperson assessment focus amplified locomotion's effect on acquisition–retention ambidexterity. Second, salespeople increased their performance by implementing an acquisition–retention ambidextrous orientation that balances prospecting for new customers and growing existing customers. Third, findings revealed a mediating effect of ambidextrous orientation on the relationship between regulatory mode and sales performance. Finally, outcomes supported the conditional moderated-mediated effect of regulatory mode in explaining performance through ambidextrous orientation. **Practical implications:** Results suggest that salespeople need to equalize their dual orientations in a complementary way to elaborate their selling strategies according to each customer. For example, in an unbalanced orientation, putting high levels of assessment into a sales encounter can reduce the effective and efficient use of time in interacting with customers.
Originality/value: The authors further illustrate the importance of using both locomotion and assessment in attaining sales goals (Pierro *et al.* 2013). This synergistic effect is known as the complementary hypothesis (Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b). Each dimension complements the other and has a moderated-mediated effect on performance through acquisition–retention ambidexterity.

Keywords: assessment | sales | retention | acquisition | ambidexterity | locomotion

Article:

Salespeople can face the dual self-regulatory challenge of focusing on assessing sales opportunities while they are developing a locomotion orientation toward sales goals. Assessment is based on critically evaluating entities with less emphasis on action, and locomotion refers to a proactive behavior and movement (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000). In addition, salespeople have a dual challenge of approaching "the acquisition and retention of customers independently" (Kumar and Petersen, 2005, p. 514). Customer retention entails behavior used in maintaining existing customers (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015), while customer acquisition refers to salesperson's actions toward creating new opportunities, leads, sales and new customers (Tsao, 2013).

Looking at these dual challenges in isolation is problematic because of a firm underspending or overspending valuable resources based on each salesperson's orientation (Thomas, 2001). A consistent equilibrium between the dual self-regulatory goals and dual acquisition and retention orientations should maximize a salesperson's ambidextrous behavior, which in turn could increase revenues (Yu *et al.*, 2013). Ambidextrous behavior refers to a salesperson's ability to pursue two seemingly conflicting goals simultaneously. In this paper, ambidextrous behavior refers to performing both assessment and locomotion regulatory modes or to be oriented toward acquiring and retaining customers (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012; DeCarlo and Lam, 2015; Carter *et al.*, 2014).

The literature on ambidextrous behavior (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012; DeCarlo and Lam, 2015; Yu *et al.*, 2013) has focused on different dualities in an isolated way, without considering how the locomotion-assessment ambidexterity can complement the acquisition–retention ambidexterity (Rapp *et al.*, 2013). Specifically, previous research on ambidextrous behavior does not consider both ambidexterities concurrently. This is surprising considering the essential role of salespeople in establishing dual self-regulatory goals for assessment and locomotion at the same time that they perform the dual behavior of prospecting and retaining customers. Three main gaps appear when reviewing existing research on ambidextrous behavior: self-regulatory goal, salesperson orientation and sales performance.

First, we know that salespeople have self-regulatory modes that drive their behavior toward sales activities (Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b; Pierro *et al.*, 2012, 2013). The literature supports the notion that either locomotion or assessment orientation influences performance based on self-determination (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2017; Faia and Vieira, 2017). However, previous studies did not analyze the potential to combine both locomotion and assessment goals in an ambidextrous way and use it as a driver of acquisition–retention ambidexterity, generating a double ambidexterity. To deal with this gap, we advance previous research that tested locomotion and assessment autonomously (Higgins *et al.*, 2003; Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000) and used acquisition and retention independently (Kumar and Petersen, 2005; Thomas *et al.*, 2004). We suggest that self-regulatory ambidexterity predicts additional variance in acquisition–retention ambidexterity (Avnet and Higgins, 2003).

Second, the existing literature suggests a main effect of self-regulatory modes on sales performance (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012; Faia and Vieira, 2017). However, previous research did not identify the mechanism by which these main effects occur. To resolve this gap, we propose a mediating effect of salesperson acquisition–retention ambidextrous behavior on the relationship between self-regulatory goals and sales performance. We extend previous findings (Sok *et al.*,

2016; Jasmand *et al.*, 2012), suggesting that locomotion and assessment create acquisition–retention ambidexterity and lead indirectly to performance. In this new perspective, self-regulatory ambidexterity increases acquisition–retention ambidextrous behavior, which plays a mediating role in explaining sales performance.

Third, existing research on self-regulatory modes supports the moderating effect of locomotion and assessment on psychological constructs such as job satisfaction (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000; Avnet and Higgins, 2003). However, previous investigation did not show how locomotion and assessment could interact with each other to indirectly boost performance by acquisition–retention ambidextrous behavior. Previous studies deal with main effects only (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015; Jasmand *et al.*, 2012; Herhausen, 2016). Thus, we extend the literature by suggesting a moderated-mediated framework. Specifically, we propose a model where self-regulatory goals create a moderating effect that indirectly increases performance via the mediating role of acquisition–retention ambidexterity. Table II presents these gaps. Table I presents how this paper fits in these three research gap.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Salesperson's orientation

A salesperson's orientation involves the focus that individuals give toward their sales goals. Some examples of orientation include balancing efforts toward sales and service behavior (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2017; Patterson *et al.*, 2014), selling new products and existing ones (Van der Borgh and Schepers, 2014), cross/up-selling and service (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012), sales and service performance (Patterson *et al.*, 2014), delivery and improvement service quality (Rapp *et al.*, 2013) and hunting and farming (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015). In this paper, we define salesperson's orientation as the goals of retaining and maintaining customers during sales activities, similar to Carter *et al.* (2014) and Kumar and Petersen (2012).

Customer retention: Customer retention involves behavior used in selling to existing customers, such as building long-term relationships, and attempting to increase sales through cross- and up-selling current customers (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015; Jasmand *et al.*, 2012). Salespeople with high levels of customer retention orientation should be excellent relationship builders, have a pleasing personality, and pay attention to customer's details (Carter *et al.*, 2014). In addition, salespeople focused on customer retention should also identify customer's problems and suggest solutions, thereby reducing complaints (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2017) and strengthening the relationship (Boles *et al.*, 2000).

Customer acquisition: Customer acquisition refers to salesperson's activities directed toward acquiring new orders and involves prospecting, call planning and making presentations to prospects (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015). Salespeople with high levels of customer acquisition orientation focus on sales growth and offer products to new customers (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2017). Typically, these salespeople "are less analytical and are risk takers" in their sales activities, are goal driven and "evaluate success by their results of new business generated" (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015, p. 420). The current research proposes that examining these

ambidexterities at the same time will provide a better explanation of sales outcomes than looking at them in isolation.

2.2 Self-regulation theory

Regulatory mode is part of the foundation of human motivation indicating an individual's preference for action or thought (Benjamin and Flynn, 2006). According to Pierro *et al.* (2013, p. 654), regulatory mode is a "psychological construct concerned with individuals' self-regulatory proclivities during goal pursuit." The theoretical foundation of regulatory modes involves self-determination theory, which suggests that there are different types of motivation that adjust goal-directed behaviors (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

> Self-determination theory suggests that when individuals are intrinsically motivated to perform tasks that are of personal interest or enjoyable to them, they are likely to engage in these tasks naturally and spontaneously without any coercion or reinforcement (Sok, Sok and De Luca, 2016, p.145).

Two self-regulating activities related to goal pursuit are locomotion (e.g. movement) and assessment (e.g. evaluating) (Higgins *et al.*, 2003; Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000).

Locomotion: Locomotion orientation is the portion of self-regulation concerned with moving from one state to another and committing the required psychological resources to initiate and maintain goal-directed progress (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000). Salespeople with high levels of locomotion orientation prefer to take action toward achieving goals rather than sit and wait for things to happen (Benjamin and Flynn, 2006).

Assessment: Assessment orientation refers to the aspects of self-regulation that deal with making comparisons and evaluations (Higgins *et al.*, 2003; Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000). For example, salespeople can compare different ways of attending new customers or judge the effectiveness of different activities concerning customer retention. Specifically, assessment orientation consists of a tendency to evaluate the value or importance of something for the purpose of understanding or taking action (Avnet and Higgins, 2006).

We propose that locomotion and assessment self-regulating activities influence salesperson's orientation, which is analyzed from the retention and acquisition perspective. Next, we explain previous literature that deals with the dual salesperson's orientation toward sales.

Table I. Previous constructs used to test ambidexterity and key findings

Authors	Constructs used to test ambidexterity	Sample	Dependent variable	Key findings
Jasmand et al. (2012)	Cross and upselling and service provision	119 customer service representatives at two call center sites	Customer satisfaction, efficiency and sales performance	Ambidextrous behavior increases customer satisfaction and sales performance but decreases efficiency. Locomotion orientation facilitates ambidextrous behavior and interacts positively with an assessment orientation
Yu et al., 2013	Service and sales	2,306 staff members in each of the 350 participating branches of a large retail bank	Customer satisfaction and performance (index from volume of deposits, credit card activity, housing mortgage activity, and personal loan activity	Empowerment and transformational leadership are positively associated with service-sales ambidexterity at individual and branch levels and team support is associated with ambidexterity only at the individual employee level
Yu et al. (2015)	Service and sales	2,306 staff members in each of the 350 participating branches of a large retail bank	Customer satisfaction and performance (index from volume of deposits, credit card activity, housing mortgage activity, and personal loan activity)	Employees' learning orientation has a positive influence on service-sales ambidexterity, but the impact of a performance-avoidance goal orientation is negative, and a performance-prove orientation has no influence
DeCarlo and Lam (2015)	Hunting and farming	357 B2B salespeople from a publicly-traded industrial distribution firm	Profit margins	A promotion (prevention) focus is more strongly related to salesperson hunting (farming) orientation than is a prevention (promotion) focus, and ambidextrous salespeople generate higher profits when they are customer oriented
Patterson et al. (2014)	Service and sales	212 front line employees in five service industries	Service-sales performance	Psychological climate perceptions, leader–member exchange, and employee self-efficacy influence service-sales performance
Agnihotri et al. (2017)	Service and sales	219 salespeople and 162 customers from B2B companies	Customer satisfaction	Sales-service ambidexterity impacts adaptive selling behaviors, and increases perceptions of role conflict among salespeople
Sok et al. (2016)	Service and sales	239 salespeople across multiple B2B firms in the pharmaceutical industry	Service and sales ambidexterity	Service–sales ambidexterity is jointly determined by enjoyment, driven, locomotion and assessment
Rapp et al. (2013)	Products and service	28 supplier salespeople, 144 retail managers, and 445 consumers	Retailer social media usage, consumer social media usage and consumer loyalty	The effect of supplier social media usage on retailer social media usage and in turn on customer social media usage is moderated by brand reputation and service ambidexterity
Carter et al. (2014)	Acquisition and retention	227 salespersons, and 106 supervisors	Sales performance	There is an inverted U-shaped linkage between the proportion of time allocated to acquisition activities and sales performance

Authors	Constructs used to test ambidexterity	Sample	Dependent variable	Key findings
Van der Borgh et al. (2015)	Selling new products and existing ones	154 sales representatives from electronic retailer	Sales performance	The results suggest two most likely strategies for salespeople to obtain overall sales targets: focusing on existing product selling; or acting ambidextrously
Van der Borgh and Schepers (2014)	Selling new products and existing ones	104 sales representatives from electronic retailer	Salesperson net profit	Ambidextrous managers promote net profit obtainment if they grant their sales employees task autonomy and give little performance feedback
Faia and Vieira (2017)	Cross and upselling and service provision	163 frontline employees who work in a bank	Sales performance and customer satisfaction	Organizational control system moderates the impact of ambidextrous behavior on performance, such that outcome-based control system amplifies the relationship
This paper	Locomotion and assessment and acquisition and retention	231 salespeople selling a wide variety of food and household products	Sales performance and revenues	Self-regulatory goals create a moderating effect that indirectly increases performance via the mediating role of acquisition–retention ambidexterity

Table II. Literature on regulatory mode, self-regulation and ambidexterity

	Regulatory mode	Self-regulation	Performance		Ambidexterity			
Papers	Moderating (loc vs. assess.)	Comparing effect sizes	Subj.	Obj.	Antecedent	Mediator	Moderator	Consequence
Jasmand et al. (2012)	✓				✓			
Yu et al., 2013					✓			
Yu, Patterson and de Ruyter (2015)					✓			
DeCarlo and Lam (2015)		✓			✓	✓		
Patterson et al. (2014)								✓
Agnihotri et al. (2017)					✓			
Sok et al. (2016)	✓							✓
Rapp et al. (2013)							✓	
Carter et al. (2014)					✓			
Van der Borgh et al. (2015)							✓	
Van der Borgh and Schepers (2014)					✓		✓	
Faia and Vieira (2017)	✓		✓			✓		
This paper	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

2.3 Salesperson's ambidexterity

Ambidextrous behavior: Ambidexterity reflects the alignment of dual but complementary goals (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012) and is responsible for reconciliation of "internal tensions and conflicting demands" (Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008, p. 375). Ambidexterity involves reconciling exploitation and exploration (Ho and Lu, 2015; Herhausen, 2016). The essence of exploitation is the refinement and extension of existing competencies, and paradigms, with positive, immediate and predictable returns (March, 1991). Exploration is the examination of new alternatives with uncertain outcomes (Cao *et al.*, 2009). In this paper, we propose that one ambidextrous behavior leads to another to generate sales performance.

Locomotion-assessment ambidexterity: Previous research suggests that locomotion and assessment are constructs that are both related and independent (Higgins *et al.*, 2003; Jasmand *et al.*, 2012). Individuals need to evaluate options at the same time that they act toward goals (Faia and Vieira, 2017). Implementing both regulatory modes simultaneously is an ambidextrous behavior that equilibrates effort toward goals (Hamstra *et al.*, 2014). Locomotion-assessment ambidexterity happens because "people can value both assessment and locomotion as ends in themselves [and] may play a role in both pre-actional and actional phases of self-regulation" (Scholer and Higgins, 2012, p. 115). Ambidextrous salespeople achieve results by carrying out acts believed to endorse quick progression toward goal achievement (i.e. locomotors), while appraising options to make the right choices (i.e. assessors) (Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b). Based on self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), high levels of both self-regulatory modes generate ambidexterity by balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation toward tasks (Sok *et al.*, 2016).

Acquisition–retention ambidexterity: To maximize results, salespeople need to balance their efforts toward customer retention and acquisition (Thomas *et al.*, 2004). Ambidextrous behavior enables salespeople to maximize retention rates of current customers, while pursuing customers who are most likely to offer future profits (Kumar and Petersen, 2005). Acquisition -retention ambidexterity refers to the way that firms balance their effort toward maintaining customers and prospecting new clients for generating more profits and market share (Kumar and Petersen, 2012; Tsao, 2013). Table II presents the focus of previous literature on self-regulatory focus and ambidexterity.

3. Theoretical model and hypotheses

Negative effect of assessment: We draw on previous literature suggesting that assessment is negatively correlated with self-confidence and optimism (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000; Higgins *et al.*, 2003) to support our first hypothesis. The logic behind this negative effect is "the tendency to constantly evaluate oneself, which is typical for the assessment-oriented person and prompts a sense of inadequacy, negative emotions, lower self-esteem, and less optimism" (Garcia *et al.*, 2015, p. 849). In addition, an individual with a high focus on assessment might have high levels of negative affect and self-destructive behavior (Jimmefors *et al.*, 2014) because "assessors may be particularly susceptible to rumination on failures or mistakes" (Pierro *et al.*, 2013, p. 655).

First, when salespeople constantly use their assessment mode, the constant rational analysis can reduce their ability to create sales opportunities (e.g. acquisition of new customers) by generating an excessive amount of time in analyzing options for prospecting potential clients (Jimmefors *et al.*, 2014; Garcia *et al.*, 2015). Second, a salesperson with a high focus on assessment spends excessive efforts in evaluating alternatives considering pros and cons, which reduces his/her intrinsic motivation toward tasks such as preserving current customers (Amato *et al.*, 2014). As a consequence, the propensity to continually evaluate oneself and the unnecessary expenditure of resources and energy in assessing alternatives generate doubts about what strategy should be implemented in a dual orientation of retention and acquisition (Benjamin and Flynn, 2006). Thus:

> *H1.* Salesperson assessment has a negative main effect on acquisition–retention ambidexterity.

Positive effect of locomotion: Locomotion orientation emphasizes the "movement from a current state to a desired state and the wish to remain involved in actions" (Avnet and Higgins, 2003, p. 526). The influence of a locomotion-focused salesperson on acquisition happens because the individual adopts a strong customer engagement orientation toward prospecting. The individual moves toward goals for obtaining new customers and creating new sales opportunities. By having a focus on goal-directed progress (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000) and by creating relationships with existing customers, a locomotion-focused salesperson increases his/her orientation toward targets and progress (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015), maintaining current customers. Additionally, a locomotion-oriented salesperson should exhibit ambidextrous behavior because he/she generates sales by obtaining repeat business from existing customers and by seeing every potential customer cue as a signal to initiate action (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012). Therefore:

> *H2.* Salesperson locomotion has a positive main effect on acquisition–retention ambidexterity.

The moderating effect of assessment on locomotion: Prior research suggests that both regulatory modes complement each other in a moderating way that increases individual focus on goal pursuit (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000). Specifically, existing research suggests that the effect of locomotion can be amplified by assessment orientation because both dimensions "contribute to self-regulatory success" (Avnet and Higgins, 2003, p. 527). As a salesperson with high levels of locomotion desires to achieve goals through action (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015), he/she moves away from a current state to address customer demands (Avnet and Higgins, 2006). When initiating a movement toward a goal, the regulatory mode of assessment can serve as a guide for critically evaluating strategies and prioritizing selling plans (Higgins *et al.*, 2003), generating a moderating effect between both self-regulatory modes. Specifically, high levels of locomotion that lead to successful goal attainment can benefit from high levels of assessment that help a salesperson make the right choice (Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b). This combination avoids the overuse of resources and efforts on unnecessary activities (Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b), producing an interactive positive effect from both self-regulatory modes on acquisition–retention ambidextrous behavior. Therefore:

H3. Assessment has a moderating effect on the relationship between locomotion and acquisition–retention ambidexterity, such that locomotion's positive effects will be amplified by high levels of assessment.

The effect of acquisition–retention ambidexterity on performance: Our model proposes that salespeople who balance their efforts toward prospecting and maintaining customers achieve greater sales performance. The logic behind this main effect is that customer acquisition is generally evaluated in terms of "wins" and is based on prospecting, developing new accounts, following a daily visit plan, and making sales presentations to potential customers (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015) that produce sales performance and profits (Reinartz *et al.*, 2005). Further, customer retention complements customer acquisition by creating value for the firm, building a relationship with current customers, elaborating efficient interactions with existing clients and cross-selling products (Kumar and Petersen, 2005). Thus, acquisition–retention by allocating effort toward maintaining relationships with current customers (Carter *et al.*, 2014) as well as prospecting and generating leads (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015) should increase sales performance (Reinartz and Kumar, 2000, 2003). Therefore:

H4. Acquisition–retention ambidexterity has a positive main effect on (a) sales performance and (b) revenues.

The mediating role of acquisition–retention ambidexterity: The theoretical model suggests an indirect effect of (a) locomotion and (b) assessment on sales performance mediated by acquisition–retention ambidexterity. Because "individuals with a high locomotion orientation engage in psychological movement" (Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b, p. 356), they should be more likely to focus on prospecting, winning new accounts, resolving problems from existing customer, and selling products to current clients (DeCarlo and Lam, 2016). Therefore, salespeople with high levels of acquisition–retention ambidextrous behavior should create sales opportunities because they put effort not only into maintaining existing customer relationships (Van der Borgh *et al.*, 2015) but also by implementing an up-selling while solving customers' problems. Therefore, this ambidextrous initiative should directly influence sales performance and help to spread the indirect positive effect of locomotion orientation. Hence:

H5a. Acquisition–retention ambidexterity mediates the positive indirect effect of salesperson locomotion on sales performance.

The proposed model further proposes an indirect negative effect of assessment on sales performance through salesperson's ambidextrous behavior. Salespeople high on assessment should adopt a stronger customer orientation toward evaluating existing customers and taking assignments and daily orders (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012). Because they prefer "to leverage relationships with actual customers to attain sales goals" (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015), while expending less efforts in prospecting, the assessment-focused individuals should disproportionately influence one dimension of ambidexterity (i.e. retention) reducing the focus on other (i.e. acquisition). Specifically, assessment-oriented salespeople may tend to excessively focus on existing clients, diminishing acquisition–retention ambidexterity and, indirectly, having a negative effect on sales performance (Garcia *et al.*, 2015). Thus:

H5b. Acquisition–retention ambidexterity mediates the negative effect of salesperson assessment on sales performance.

Conditional moderated-mediated effect: A final assumption proposed by our model extends previously hypothesized relationships and suggests a conditional moderated-mediated effect. We propose that assessment amplifies the indirect effect of locomotion on sales performance through the mediating role of acquisition–retention ambidexterity.

Individuals with high levels of locomotion orientation should produce better acquisition–retention ambidexterity results with high levels of assessment because they are more critical in evaluating options toward a target (Avnet and Higgins, 2003; Higgins *et al.*, 2003). This moderated effect occurs because the salesperson spends more time on critically analyzing sales goals at the same time that he/she engages in sales activities, such as offering new products to consumers (Haenlein and Libai, 2013). Thus, the higher the locomotion-assessment ambidexterity; the higher the acquisition–retention ambidexterity (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012). The proposed interactive effect occurs because regulatory mode is a psychological construct concerned with individuals' self-regulatory proclivities during goal pursuit, while critically evaluating entities or states.

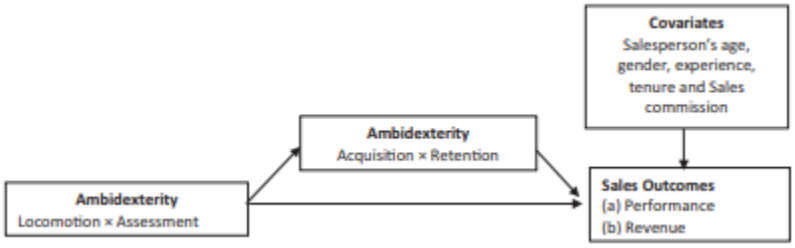

Figure 1. Moderated-mediated theoretical framework

The dual and balanced regulatory goals match with the dual acquisition and retention orientations because the salesperson obtains new customers while at the same time maintaining a relationship with existing customers (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015) using both evaluation and action regulation. The second dual ambidexterity works as a mediating mechanism linking to performance because it looks to improve sales by maintaining and prospecting clients. Thus, we assume that locomotion-assessment ambidexterity influences directly acquisition–retention ambidexterity and indirectly sales performance. Therefore, we propose:

H6. There is a moderated-mediated effect of salesperson locomotion and assessment interaction on performance through acquisition–retention ambidexterity, such that the higher the regulatory mode of assessment, the stronger the indirect effect of locomotion on sales performance by ambidexterity.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework and hypotheses. We propose a main effect of locomotion orientation (*H1*), assessment orientation (*H2*) and locomotion-assessment ambidexterity (*H3*) on acquisition–retention ambidexterity. We further propose that acquisition–retention ambidexterity also affects performance (*H4*). Next, we hypothesize an indirect influence of locomotion (*H5a*) and assessment (*H5b*) on performance by the mediating role of

acquisition–retention ambidexterity. Then, we conclude with a moderated-mediated effect of locomotion × assessment on performance through acquisition–retention ambidexterity (*H6*).

4. Research design

4.1 Data collecting and sample

Salespeople involved in the study represent major multi-national consumer packaged goods firms selling a wide variety of food and household products (such as beverages, meals, snacks, pet supplies, oral hygiene, foods and cleaning products) to a wholesaler. This wholesaler resells them to supermarket chains. A large wholesaler cooperated for this study, allowing data collection among salespeople who made personal contact with the company's purchasing department within a period of two months. The wholesaler is located in a city with a population between 100,000 and 200,000 in Brazil. Salespeople represent their firms need to balance their locomotion and assessment orientation to achieve their sales goals and wholesaler purchasing staff demands.

The wholesaler-purchasing staff received training from the researchers about the purpose of the survey and the approach for applying the questionnaire toward the salespeople. After the purchasing staff member negotiated with salespeople, he/she presented the questionnaire to the salesperson. Questionnaires were printed and personally delivered to each salesperson during the sales encounter. The vendor answered the questions in a separate room and put the questionnaire in a box, ensuring anonymity. Note that these salespeople also sell their products to other competing wholesalers in the state. The wholesaler-purchasing staff provided us with information regarding the revenues generated by each salesperson after negotiations. Thus, we matched the answers from salespeople with their individual sales to the wholesaler.

We invited 278 salespeople to participate in the survey, and we received 231 completed surveys (83 per cent). Salesperson average age was 37.7 years old (SD = 8.1, ranging from 22 to 56). Of the respondents, 89 per cent were male, and 28 per cent had a college degree. Average sales experience was 8.4 years (SD = 4.7, ranging from 1 to 25), and tenure in the company was 5.4 years (SD = 3.7, ranging from 1 to 21). Salesperson average revenues was $64,417.00 (SD = $192,052.00, ranging from 800.00 to 2,318,247.00).

4.2 Construct definition and measures

We measured customer acquisition and retention using four items for each dimension based on DeCarlo and Lam (2015). To measure the ambidextrous behavior of salespeople, we computed the multiplicative term between customer acquisition and retention dimensions. This approach is based on previous literature (Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008; Cao *et al.*, 2009). The measure of ambidexterity reflects the non-substitutable and interdependent nature of customer acquisition and retention activities and is consistent with other marketing studies (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012; Yu *et al.*, 2013; Yu *et al.*, 2015).

We measured self-regulatory modes based on Kruglanski *et al.* (2000), which includes nine items for locomotion and nine items for assessment. To create self-regulatory ambidextrous

behavior, we computed the multiplicative term using both regulatory modes (Ho and Lu, 2015; Herhausen, 2016). This approach is based on previous literature (Pierro *et al.*, 2008, 2009; 2012, 2013).

Sales performance was measured subjectively and objectively to reduce the common method bias. Subjective sales performance reflects the salespersons' perception of achieving sales goals, market share, high profit margin and exceeding sales targets. We asked salespeople to evaluate themselves via self-ratings to ascertain a subjective measure of sales performance. We assessed performance via four items adapted from Sujan *et al.* (1994). Boles *et al.* (2000) used a similar measure (Appendix). Other research also has used self-ratings to measure sales performance (Brown and Peterson, 1994).

Similar to Spyropoulou *et al.* (2018, p. 118), we used self-report measures because:

> […] objective measures may be biased by the purpose for which they are produced, previous studies find corroboration between subjective and corresponding objective performance indicators, and the literature suggests that perceptions of reality

Correlation between objective data and sales performance was $r = 0.19$ ($p < 0.01$) and correlation between objective data (sales revenue) and sales goal achievement was $r = 0.44$ ($p < 0.01$), enhancing confidence in the validity of our self-report measure.

We obtained sales revenue values from the firm's database, which provided the total sales of each salesperson to the wholesaler in the local currency. We adjusted the sales revenue values using the log normal distribution of salesperson's total sales revenue for the month prior to the research. This log transformation is used in previous marketing studies (Haenlein and Libai, 2013). We used natural logarithm because it helps to achieve a normal data distribution (Aitchison and Ho, 1989).

Covariates: We used covariates to check their relationship with the dependent variable. The process of using covariates is consistent with previous sales research (Homburg *et al.*, 2011). Based on Boles *et al.* (2000) and Patterson *et al.* (2014), we used single item categorical measures to assess sales commission (yes/no), salesperson age and gender, salesperson experience in sales (years) and tenure in the current company (years). In all estimates, we controlled the results of performance and revenues by these covariates.

5. Results

We analyzed the psychometric properties of our scales using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. All results were according to benchmarks demanded by Fan *et al.* (1999). We also calculated convergent and discriminant validity, Cronbach alpha, composite reliability and constructs means. The fit index for the theoretical model was $\chi^2/df = 1.53$, $p < 0.001$; goodness fit index (GFI) = 0.84; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.92; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.90, and root mean square error of approximation (RSMEA) = 0.05; confidence interval for default model ranges from 0.04 to 0.05 and confidence interval for independence model ranges from 0.14 to

0.15; sample size is $n = 231$. Table III presents the correlation matrix, average, and standard deviation.

To analyze the variations on ambidextrous behavior, we inserted the covariates, the locomotion and assessment, and the moderating term between them as independents constructs. To explain the variations on performance, we used the covariates, and acquisition–retention ambidexterity as independent variables. Table IV presents the results.

Covariates main effects: We first tested the main effects of the covariates. Sales commission ($\beta = 0.221$, $p < 0.05$) was positively related to performance and sales experience ($\beta = 0.039$, $p < 0.05$) had a positive relationship with revenues. These covariates explained only 4 per cent and 6 per cent of sales performance and revenues variation, respectively. No other covariate had a significant effect on ambidextrous behavior ($R^2 = 0.7$ per cent). Because the explained variance was low, we did not identify problems in our model associated with the covariates.

5.1 Main effect of self-regulatory mode on acquisition–retention ambidexterity

H1 and *H2* address the two dimensions of self-regulatory mode as predictors of salesperson ambidextrous behavior. We derive our assumption based on self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and regulatory goals (Pierro *et al.*, 2008, 2009; 2012, 2013; Avnet and Higgins, 2003; Amato *et al.*, 2014). The main effect of assessment ($\beta = -1.364$, $p =$ NS) was not significant, despite the expected negative direction, thus, rejecting *H1*. Overall, this non-significant finding is interesting because previous research reported that assessment was negatively associated with ambidexterity among salespeople.

The positive main impact of locomotion ($\beta = 3.786$, $p < 0.01$) on acquisition–retention ambidexterity was significant, supporting *H2*. The theoretical explanation for this effect is that individuals worry about how to make progress toward their sales, and consequently they move to implement acquisition and retention strategies that are effective in helping them meet their goals (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000). A locomotion-focused salesperson focuses on goal achievement and generating sales (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015).

5.2 The moderating effect of assessment × locomotion on acquisition–retention ambidexterity

The model proposed that assessment amplifies the positive main effect of locomotion on ambidextrous behavior (*H3*). Results indicate that assessment amplified the effect of locomotion on acquisition–retention ambidexterity, supporting the moderating effect ($\beta = 7.687$, $p < 0.01$). The rationality behind this assumption is that when salespeople give focus to both self-regulatory modes for achieving the dual sales orientations (Orehek and Vazeou-Nieuwenhuis, 2013; Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b), they balance their efforts toward thinking and acting to retain existing customers at same time that they prospect for new ones.

Figure 2 shows a crossover effect indicating that when the regulatory mode of assessment is high, the positive effect of locomotion on ambidexterity is amplified ($\beta = 15.09$, $p < 0.001$). Otherwise, when the regulatory mode of assessment is low, the relationship between locomotion and ambidexterity becomes negative ($\beta = -4.98$, $p < 0.01$).

Table III. Descriptive information and correlations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Locomotion orientation	1										
2. Assessment orientation	–0.25**	1									
3. Acquisition	0.54**	–0.64**	1								
4. Retention	–0.01	0.31**	–0.16*	1							
5. Sales performance	0.10	0.06	0.16*	0.16*	1						
6. Revenue	0.28**	0.03	0.05	0.11	0.19**	1					
7. Salesperson gender	0.01	–0.03	0.02	–0.06	–0.00	–0.01	1				
8. Salesperson age	0.02	–0.05	0.03	–0.07	0.10	0.06	0.08	1			
9. Experience in sales	0.03	0.03	–0.02	0.00	0.10	0.18**	0.07	0.83**	1		
10. Tenure in company	0.05	0.03	–0.01	–0.04	0.10	0.15*	0.09	0.76**	0.89**	1	
11. Sales commission (yes/no)	–0.13*	0.03	–0.07	–0.03	0.14*	–0.14*	–0.01	0.08	0.03	0.01	1
Mean	5.36	4.32	5.07	5.28	9.01	4.40[a]	—	.7.7	8.4	5.4	—
Standard deviation	0.54	0.71	0.91	0.44	0.65	0.69	—	8.1	4.7	3.7	—
Cronbach's alpha	0.88	0.86	0.90	0.68	0.70	—	—	—	—	—	—
Composite reliability	0.88	0.87	0.81	0.71	0.70	—	—	—	—	—	—
Average variance extracted (AVE)	0.52	0.48	0.67	0.38	0.38	—	—	—	—	—	—
Square root of AVE	0.72	0.69	0.82	0.62	0.62	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes: **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; (—) not available; [a] Revenue values are in logarithmic form

Table IV. Parameter estimates for the hypothesized model

	Acquisition–retention ambidexterity		Sales performance		Revenue	
Predictors	**Estimate**	***SE***	**Estimate**	***SE***	**Estimate**	***SE***
Covariates						
Salesperson gender	–0.796	1,093	0.013	0.172	–0.06	0.103
Salesperson age	–0.024	0.081	–0.011	0.012	–0.013†	0.007
Experience in sales	0.149	0.190	0.021	0.030	0.039*	0.018
Tenure in company	–0.172	0.207	0.021	0.032	–0.001	0.019
Sales commission (yes/no)	–0.538	0.734	0.221*	0.115	–0.131†	0.068
Main effects						
Locomotion (*H2*)	3.786**	0.818				
Assessment (*H1*)	–1.364	0.931				
Locomotion–assessment Ambidexterity (*H4*)			0.027**	0.010	0.012*	0.006
Moderating effect						
Locomotion × assessment (*H3*)	7.687**	1.765				
Variance explained	60%		09%		09%	

Notes: **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.10$ (two-tailed). Estimate reports unstandardized coefficients with standard errors (SE) in the right

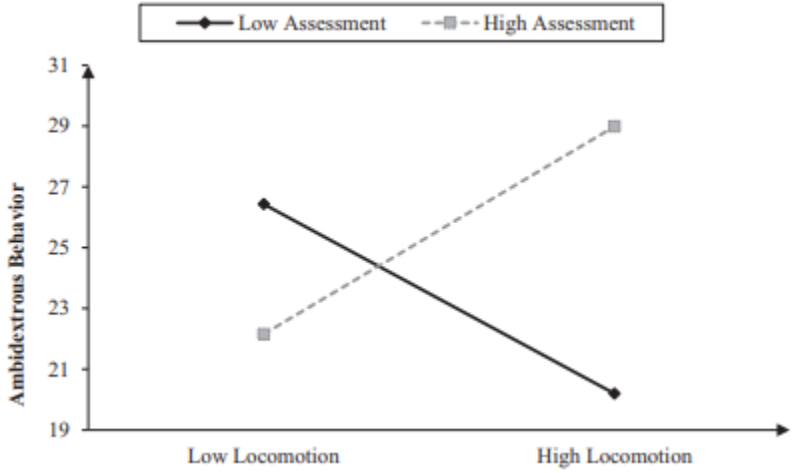

Figure 2. Moderating effect of regulatory mode

Table V. Moderated-mediation effect of regulatory mode on performance through ambidexterity

Mediation hypothesis	**Indirect effect**	**SE**	**Lower CI**	**Upper CI**	**Z**	***p*-value**
Single mediated effect						
H5a: locomotion → acquisition–retention ambidexterity → sales performance	0.148	0.049	0.061	0.249	3.001	0.00
H5a: locomotion → acquisition–retention ambidexterity → revenue	–0.002	0.039	–0.078	0.073	–0.068	0.946
H5b: assessment → acquisition–retention ambidexterity → sales performance	–0.274	0.071	–0.426	–0.144	–4.194	0.000
H5b: assessment → acquisition–retention ambidexterity → revenue	–0.161	0.049	–0.268	–0.074	–3.229	0.001
Conditional moderated-mediated effect						
H6: locom. × assessment fi acquisition–retention ambidexterity fi sales performance	0.368	0.099	0.185	0.577	3.717	0.000
H6: locom. × assessment fi acquisition–retention ambidexterity fi revenue	0.139	0.073	0.004	0.291	1.904	0.057
Post hoc additional analysis						
Locom. × low assessm. → acquisition–retention ambidexterity → sales performance	–0.038	0.031	–0.113	0.011	–1.226	0.219
Locom. × high assessm. → acquisition–retention ambidexterity → sales performance	0.380	0.100	0.194	0.589	3.800	0.000
Locom. × low assessm. → acquisition–retention ambidexterity → revenue	–0.014	0.014	–0.057	0.003	–1.000	0.317
Locom. × high assessm. → acquisition–retention ambidexterity → revenue	0.144	0.075	0.001	0.299	1.920	0.055

Notes: 5.000 bootstrap sample estimates for indirect effect analysis by bias-corrected percentile method. SE = error; CI = lower/upper confidence interval; Z = *z* score; *p*-value = significance level; Boundaries of 95% bootstrap confidence intervals (two-tailed). *H5* were estimated by Model 4 and *H6* by Model 8 of macro process for SPSS

The theoretical logic on this positive interaction is that locomotion is amplified by assessment orientation because both dimensions contribute to the self-regulatory success of achieving goals through action (Avnet and Higgins, 2003; DeCarlo and Lam, 2015). Thus, there is a synergistic effect between the two self-regulatory focus so that movement toward the goal serves as a motivator to assess strategies and arrange selling plans (Higgins *et al.*, 2003; Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b). This moderating effect is expected and in agreement with the previous psychological literature (Orehek and Vazeou-Nieuwenhuis, 2013; Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b).

5.3 Ambidexterity–performance link

Results indicated that the salesperson's acquisition–retention ambidextrous behavior is positively related to sales performance ($\beta = 0.027$, $p < 0.01$), as well as sales revenues ($\beta = 0.012$, $p < 0.05$), supporting *H4a* and *H4b*. These effects support previous findings reporting that salesperson ambidexterity elucidates satisfaction, efficiency, and subjective performance (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012), branch financial performance (Yu *et al.*, 2013), profit (de Carlo and Lam, 2015), satisfaction (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2017), and social media usage (Rapp *et al.*, 2013). We extend previous results by using ambidextrous behavior in a B2B sales context and, by mixing both subjective and objective performance measures.

5.4 Mediation role of acquisition–retention ambidexterity

Next, we tested the indirect influence of locomotion and assessment on sales performance by acquisition–retention ambidexterity (*H5a* and *H5b*). The model proposes that ambidexterity plays a mediating role between both self-regulatory modes and sales outcomes. To test these two mediating assumptions, we used the bootstrap procedure with 5.000 sample estimates for indirect effect analysis by the bias-corrected percentile method. Table V presents the results.

As expected, the findings indicated a mediating role of acquisition–retention ambidexterity on the relationship between locomotion and sales performance ($\beta = 0.148$, $p < 0.01$; *H5a*), but not between locomotion and revenue ($\beta = -0.002$, $p =$ NS). This result supports the argument that individuals with high locomotion engage in action and movement toward maintaining and prospecting customers, which in turn increases sales performance (Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b; DeCarlo and Lam, 2015). Therefore, performance indirectly derives from psychological resources to initiate and preserve goal-directed progress (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000) and continues by salesperson's ambidextrous behavior. Non-significant findings regarding revenue may indicate that these salespeople focus more on closing a deal (winning a sale) than on generating revenue, which may be a more long-term sales orientation and may not be as attractive to an action-driven salesperson.

We also found support for the mediating role of acquisition–retention ambidexterity on the indirect relationship between assessment and performance. Results indicated a significant indirect impact of this self-regulatory focus on sales performance ($\beta = -0.274$, $p < 0.001$) and on sales revenue ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.001$) through ambidexterity. Both results are expected and suggest that performance is indirectly reduced when salespeople invest a lot of effort on interpretation and critical appraising (Avnet and Higgins, 2006). The negative indirect effect

comes from the propensity to continually assess oneself and reflect on failures or faults (Pierro *et al.*, 2013), which reduces performance (Garcia *et al.*, 2015).

5.5 Conditional moderated-mediation effect

Finally, we propose a conditional moderated-mediation effect from locomotion-assessment ambidexterity to acquisition–retention ambidexterity and indirectly to performance. This conditional moderated-mediation effect suggests the higher (vs lower) the regulatory mode of assessment, the stronger (vs weaker) the influence of locomotion (i.e. moderator) on acquisition–retention ambidexterity (i.e. mediator) that in turn indirectly increases performance.

The indirect effect of locomotion × assessment on performance by acquisition–retention ambidexterity was significant for sales performance ($\beta = 0.368$, $p < 0.01$) and revenues ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < 0.01$). This result suggests that greater values of performance happen when salespeople have high locomotion and high assessment ($\beta_{high \times high} = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$) rather than high locomotion and low assessment ($\beta_{high \times low} = -0.03$, p = NS). Therefore, we can conclude that self-regulatory ambidexterity leads to acquisition–retention ambidexterity, which in turn increases sales performance. Because the effects are positive, self-regulatory ambidexterity corrects the negative effect of assessment.

Next, we find the same pattern for sales revenue. The results indicated a significant effect of self-regulatory ambidexterity on revenue by acquisition–retention ambidexterity ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < 0.05$). In analyzing the data, we found that having high levels of the self-regulatory mode in both dimensions (locomotion and assessment) is better for revenue ($\beta_{high \times high} = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$) than having mixed levels of self-regulatory ($\beta_{high \times low} = -0.01$, p = NS). Explicitly stated, there is a moderated effect of salesperson locomotion and assessment on performance through the mediating role of ambidexterity.

This moderated-mediation effect occurs because regulatory mode is a psychological construct concerned with individuals' self-regulatory proclivities during goal pursuit, while critically evaluating entities or states (Van der Borgh *et al.*, 2015; Higgins *et al.*, 2003; Pierro *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b), which leads to balanced approach to the dual goals of acquisition and retention of customers (DeCarlo and Lam, 2015; Reinartz *et al.*, 2005; Reinartz and Kumar, 2000, 2003) leading to performance. Table V presents the results.

5.6 Post hoc analysis: balancing acquisition–retention ambidexterity

Acquisition–retention ambidexterity reflects the alignment of dual but complementary goals (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012). In order for them to complement each other, salespeople should have high levels of orientation in acquisition and retention balancing both orientations (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2017). However, a firm can expect an unbalanced alignment on the part of some salespeople that could reduce performance. To check the (un)balanced assumption of Cao *et al.* (2009) and Raisch and Birkinshaw (2008), we test the relationship of dual ambidexterity on performance.

We used the K-means algorithm for creating four groups. Group 1 consisted of no ambidextrous behavior (low acquisition and low retention values, $n = 8$). Groups 2 and 3 consisted of acquisition (high-low, $n = 99$) and retention orientations (low-high, $n = 22$), in an unbalanced way. Group 4 consisted of highly ambidextrous salespeople because they balance both skills (with high ratings on both dimensions, $n = 102$). This procedure is the same suggested by Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) and Lubatkin *et al.* (2006) for testing the balancing effect of acquisition–retention ambidexterity. In extending their assumption to B2B sales context, we believe that the ambidextrous salespeople group will have superior performance because they balance both skills at high levels.

The ANOVA F-test showed a significant difference in achieving not only revenues [$F(1,230) = 2.76$, $p < 0.04$], but also performance [$F(1,230) = 6.08$, $p < 0.001$]. We used the Tukey HSD post hoc test for checking the differences. Group 4 (acquisition–retention ambidexterity) had the best performance, followed by the other groups. When analyzing sales performance, we found a significant difference for the ambidextrous group vs the non-ambidextrous group ($M_{\text{ambidextrous}} = 8.86$ vs $M_{\text{non-ambidextrous}} = 8.12$; $p < 0.01$) and for ambidextrous group vs acquisition group ($M = 8.86_{\text{ambidextrous}}$ vs $M_{\text{acquisition}} = 8.55$; $p < 0.004$).

When examining revenues, we found noteworthy variance for the ambidextrous group versus non-ambidextrous group ($M_{\text{ambidextrous}} = 4.47$ vs $M_{\text{non-ambidextrous}} = 3.97$; $p < 0.038$). These findings provide supplementary support for our theoretical model, expanding Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004), Cao *et al.* (2009), and Lubatkin *et al.* (2006).

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical implications

First, the current investigation on self-regulatory focus demonstrates that locomotion and assessment influence motivation (Benjamin and Flynn, 2006), goal-directed behaviors (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and progress (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2000). In sales, these two regulatory modes increase performance (Faia and Vieira, 2017; Jasmand *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, there is no clear understanding regarding how self-regulatory mode explains a dual ambidextrous behavior in a B2B field. To address this issue, we demonstrate that both regulatory modes can be used together and balanced to explain salesperson ambidexterity. Specifically, we found that a locomotion regulatory mode is positively related to ambidexterity and that this relationship is amplified by assessment. The positive moderating effect is because self-regulation includes an analytical assessment function that offers feedback to locomotion-oriented salespeople, providing salespeople with ideas about the best ways to achieve sales goals. Our results are congruent with regulatory focus theory (Pierro *et al.*, 2008, 2009; 2012, 2013), showing how the trade-off between both modes of self-regulation helps to develop dual customer acquisition and retention orientations and to balance the trade-off between movement and accuracy in goal-relevant tasks.

Second, recent research in ambidextrous behavior suggests that different dualities, such as service provision and cross-/up-selling activities (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012), exploration and exploitation through social media (Rapp *et al.*, 2013) as well as intuitive and deliberative judgments improve sales efficiency (Hall *et al.*, 2015). The current study contributes to a better

comprehension of the twin aspect of salesperson's ambidexterity by extending these previous studies. We show that salespeople who implement an aligned ambidextrous behavior – allocating effort to efficient maintenance of customer relationships (Carter *et al.*, 2014), while prospecting for future customers – achieved better sales outcomes. The rationality behind this effect is because ambidextrous behavior reflects the alignment of two self-regulatory modes in the pursuit of complementary goals (Jasmand *et al.*, 2012). In aligning the two self-regulatory modes and orientations, salespeople can reconcile "internal tensions and conflicting demands" (Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008, p. 375).

Finally, previous research in ambidextrous behaviors worked with only two dimensions to explain firm results (Rapp *et al.*, 2013; Hall *et al.*, 2015; Yu *et al.*, 2013, 2015). The current study illustrates the importance of using locomotion-assessment ambidexterity for attaining sales goals (Pierro *et al.*, 2013) and generating acquisition–retention ambidexterity (i.e. four dimensions). We extend earlier investigations by proposing a moderated-mediated effect of ambidexterity on ambidexterity and performance. Because assessment complements the beneficial effects of locomotion, salespeople can perform better on the dual goal pursuit of acquisition–retention ambidexterity, which in turn indirectly increases sales outcomes.

6.2 Managerial implications

Managers should emphasize the importance of avoiding an unbalanced orientation. They must avoid focusing too much on using high levels of assessment in combination with low levels of locomotion. Such a misalignment is likely to reduce his/her proactivity toward prospecting for new customers and maintaining current clients. Second, to improve salesperson performance managers should train their salespeople to strive for a combined acquisition–retention ambidextrous behavior, which balances the need to acquire as well as retain customers. Managers can help salespeople accomplish this balance by establishing specific time and work routines for maintaining current customers (e.g. call for them, sending e-mail, interacting toward social media) and routines for activities such as prospecting new clients (e.g. call planning and making presentations for potential leads). By coaching salespeople on how to use an acquisition–retention ambidexterity based on the individual salesperson's needs, managers can obtain the best-balanced behavior from their salespeople and thereby improve company sales performance.

Third, if salespeople do not have a balanced ambidextrous orientation, the best results may come from a focus on the retention of current customers. While he/she works on developing a more ambidextrous approach to the sales efforts, the individual salesperson should focus more on developing relationships to maintain their current customers. This approach should maximize sales results while the salesperson works on developing a more balanced approach to her/his sales efforts.

6.3 Future research

Future research can build upon and further delineate results found in this study. Jasmand *et al.* (2012) and Pierro *et al.* (2006a, 2006b) suggested that the interaction of both regulatory modes could influence performance on difficult tasks because locomotion leverages the capacity of activity and assessment serves as a guide to take better decisions. Difficult tasks can reduce

the positive effect of locomotion but cannot reduce the influence of assessment because individuals think critically about options to resolve sales problems. Future research needs to investigate the moderating role of task difficulty on the main effect of locomotion and assessment on acquisition–retention ambidexterity.

Hamstra *et al.* (2014) found that leadership coercive power moderates the relationship between performance and regulatory modes. For assessment-oriented employees, performance is higher when the leader exerts coercive power through threats of negative consequences. This may occur because coercive power encourages additional action on the part of a salesperson with a high level of assessment but low locomotion. Future research could investigate the moderating effect of a coercive leadership power in the relationship between regulatory mode and acquisition–retention ambidexterity.

6.4 Limitations

The current study has several potential limitations. First, the study is based on the individual salesperson rather than a sales team. It is possible that some ambidexterity functions can be achieved by different members of the sales team where the selling effort is done in a team setting. Second, while the paper's focus involves ambidexterity, the revenues are focused on one salesperson who are dealing with the wholesaler. Further, the measure focuses more on retention rather than acquisition. Third, the findings may be moderated by the culture where the study was conducted. For example, the country could have a culture in which wholesaler purchasing is focused on buying online from multinational firms rather than from vendors. Finally, the findings uncovered by the current study may not be generalizable to salespeople operating in a different business environment, such as B2C sales.

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Appendix

Measurement

Locomotion orientation; Kruglanski *et al.* (2000) 1 = totally disagree to 10 = totally agree.
I feel excited just before I am about to reach a goal.
By the time I accomplish a task, I already have the next one in mind.
I am a "workaholic."
When I decide to do something, I cannot wait to get started.
Most of the times my thoughts are occupied with the task I wish to accomplish.
I enjoy actively doing things, more than just watching and observing.
I am a "doer."
When I get started on something, I usually persevere until I finish it.
I don't mind doing things even if they involve extra effort.
Assessment orientation; Kruglanski *et al.* (2000) 1 = totally disagree to 10 = totally agree
I like evaluating other people's plans.
I am a critical person.
I often critique work done by myself or others.
I often feel that I am being evaluated by others.
When I meet a new person I usually evaluate how well he or she is doing on various dimensions (e.g. looks, achievements, social status, clothes).
I spend a great deal of time taking inventory of my positive and negative characteristics
I am very self-critical and self-conscious about what I am saying.
I often think that other people's choices and decisions are wrong.
I often compare myself with other people.
Acquisition orientation; DeCarlo and Lam (2015) 1 = totally disagree to 10 = totally agree
To "hunt" for a new sales opportunity is the most enjoyable part of the job.
I am at my best when I engage a new prospect that I have never met before.
I prefer to spend the majority of my day prospecting and closing new accounts.

The most enjoyable part of the job is selling to new accounts.
Retention orientation; DeCarlo and Lam (2015) 1 = totally disagree to 10 = totally agree
Spending time working with current customers is the most enjoyable part of the job.
My best attributes are my customer relations skills where I work for the best interests of my current customers.
The most gratifying is working with an established customer.
Of all my responsibilities, I most enjoy using my skills to maintain and grow existing accounts.
Sales performance; Sujan *et al.* (1994) 1 = totally disagree to 10 = totally agree
I contribute to the company's sales acquiring a good market share.
I generate a high level of sales.
I achieving sales with high profit-margin products.
I exceed sales targets.
Revenue
The total sales revenue regarding the month prior to the research. The sales revenue values were obtained from the wholesale, which informed the total of buying from each salesperson in the local currency.
Salesperson experience
How long is your experience in sales activities (years)?
Salesperson tenure
How long has this salesperson worked for your organization (years)?