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From cognition to action: the effect of thought self-leadership strategies and self-monitoring on adaptive selling behavior

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Recommended Citation

Alnakhli, H., Singh, R., Agnihotri, R. and Itani, O.S. (2020), "From cognition to action: the effect of thought self-leadership strategies and self-monitoring on adaptive selling behavior", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 35 No. 12, pp. 1915-1927. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-06-2019-0302>

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Publication metadata

Title: From cognition to action: the effect of thought self-leadership strategies and self-monitoring on adaptive selling behavior

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Journal: Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing.

DOI/Link: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-06-2019-0302>

How to cite this post-print:

Alnakhli, H., Singh, R., Agnihotri, R., & Itani, O. S. (2020). From cognition to action: the effect of thought self-leadership strategies and self-monitoring on adaptive selling behavior. Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing. DOI, 10.1108/JBIM-06-2019-0302

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From Cognition to Action: The effect of Self-monitoring and Thought Self-Leadership Strategies on Adaptive Selling Behavior

Journal:	<i>Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing</i>
Manuscript ID	JBIM-06-2019-0302.R3
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Adaptive Selling, Thought Self-Leadership, Self-monitoring, Self-management, Non-western sales force

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3 **FROM COGNITION TO ACTION: THE EFFECT OF THOUGHT SELF-LEADERSHIP**
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5 **STRATEGIES AND SELF-MONITORING ON ADAPTIVE SELLING BEHAVIOR**
6

7
8 **Abstract**
9

10 As salespeople are constantly facing different customers with various needs and wants and
11 engaging in various sales situations, salespeople must deploy their inner capabilities in practicing
12 adaptive selling behavior during and across sales interactions. This study investigates the effect of
13 salesperson's thought self-leadership and self-monitoring on adaptive selling behavior. We draw
14 on the social cognitive theory of self-regulation to develop our model and examine the
15 relationships between thought self-leadership, self-monitoring, and adaptive selling behavior. We
16 empirically test the model using data from 335 pharmaceutical salespeople working across several
17 countries in Asia. Findings suggest that thought self-leadership impacts adaptive selling behaviors,
18 especially when salespeople have self-monitoring skills. In light of these results, we explore
19 implications, limitations, and conclude by suggesting directions for further research.
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21

22
23 **Keywords:** Adaptive selling behavior, self-monitoring, thought self-leadership, social cognitive
24 theory, salespeople
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3 Imagine how prosperous a firm would be if every employee becomes a self-leader who
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5 proactively takes initiatives, resolves problems on their own, and actively searches for methods
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7 to cultivate his/her performance. Such situations are especially relevant in sales context.
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10 Salespeople are increasingly situated away from their organizations working across space, time
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12 zones, and often cultural boundaries (Ingram et al., 2005). Under such circumstances, they lack
13
14 active supervision and they are less able to be guided and motivated by their supervisors.
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16 Moreover, due to the increasing complexities in B2B selling situations, salespeople need to
17
18 adjust their message constantly during sales encounters (Rapp et al., 2015). Consequently,
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20 adaptive selling continues to be the fundamental selling approach in a B2B context. This
21
22 warrants a fresh look at the drivers of salesperson's adaptive selling behaviors.
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26 In the recent years, several sales scholars have shifted their attention to the intrapersonal
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28 aspect of influence, in which leadership originates within the individual with the purpose to
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30 inspire and influence oneself (e.g., Panagopoulos and Ogilvie, 2015; Singh et al., 2017). Self-
31
32 leadership can be defined as a learned behavior because individual and managerial interferences
33
34 can influence the extent to which individuals participate in associated activities (Manz, 1986).
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36 Thought self-leadership (hereafter as, TSL) is considered as one type of self-leadership
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38 strategies. TSL is conceptualized as the manifestation of a constructive thought process and
39
40 maintenance including specific mental strategies such as positive self-talk, mental imagery, and
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42 evaluation of dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions (Houghton and Jinkerson, 2007; Neck and
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44 Manz, 1996).
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49 Extant literature suggests that the importance of TSL is increasingly recognized in sales
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51 research (e.g., Ingram et al., 2005; Panagopoulos and Ogilvie, 2015). For instance, Panagopoulos
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53 and Ogilvie (2015) have found that TSL positively relates to salespersons' self-efficacy and sales
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3 performance. Despite growing research interest in this field of inquiry, greater understanding of
4 the benefits that accrue to the organizations through self-leadership empowerment programs for
5 salespeople is needed.
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10 The current research is grounded on social cognitive theory of self-regulation (Bandura,
11 1986; 1991) which allows exploration of (a) the effect of thought self-leadership strategies on
12 adaptive selling behavior; (b) examination of the impact of self-monitoring on adaptive selling
13 behavior; and (c) investigation of the role of self-monitoring as a potential moderating
14 mechanism in the relationship between thought self-leadership strategies and adaptive selling
15 behavior (see Figure 1). We argue that salespeople at higher levels of self-monitoring may be
16 particularly poised to deploy TSL strategies and, thus, engage in adaptive selling behaviors.
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26 Our research offers contributions to theory and practice. First, we extend the
27 salesperson's TSL and self-monitoring literature by examining TSL strategies and self-
28 monitoring as key cognitive processes driving adaptive selling behaviors. Second, we offer an
29 alternative perspective on the mechanism through which a salesperson's adaptive selling
30 behaviors can be enhanced to drive performance. Further, we provide additional explanation to
31 strengthen the arguments linking positive psychology to adaptive selling behaviors. This vein of
32 inquiry addresses calls for research to place a sharper focus on positive valance variables and
33 their role in driving salesperson's behaviors (Panagopoulos and Ogilvie, 2015; Friend et al.,
34 2016; Lyngdoh et al., 2018).
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48 Insert Figure 1 about here
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50 **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

51 TSL can be defined as “a process of influencing or leading oneself through the purposeful
52 control of one's thoughts” (Neck, 1996, p. 203). In other words, it is the process of influencing
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oneself as compared to the influence of managers over employees. TSL has been viewed as an integral component and a distinct dimension of self-leadership strategies, which involves making the best use of mental strategies to develop and maintain constructive thoughts (Panagopoulos and Ogilvie, 2015). These cognitive strategies serve salespeople in a way that enables them to practice the self-influence (e.g., self-efficacy) necessary to achieve work-related goals and therefore enhance their sales performance (Panagopoulos and Ogilvie, 2015; Singh and Venugopal, 2015).

TSL encompasses the use of constructive thought through certain mental strategies that comprise the use of (1) positive self-talk; (2) mental imagery; and (3) evaluation of dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions (Houghton and Jinkerson, 2007, Neck and Manz, 1996; Neck et al., 1999). This notion posits that constructive thought management, through effective application of these cognitive strategies, can enhance individual cognitive processes, behaviors, and affective states (see Manz and Neck, 1991; Neck and Manz, 1992).

In fact, it has been found that each of the constructive thought strategies plays a positive role in a salesperson's self-leading capabilities (Singh et al., 2017). According to Neck and Manz (1996), when one engages in these cognitive strategies, s/he contributes to the constructive thought process formation. Hence, these strategies assist a salesperson in establishing the self-influence needed for increasing sales performance.

Through the use of positive self-talk, salespeople can maintain a continuous self-dialogue to impact positive emotional states and cognition (Ellis, 1988; Neck and Manz, 1992). Based on what employees secretly tell themselves, they can encourage more optimistic self-dialogue and suppress negative self-talk (Houghton and Jinkerson, 2007). These positive self-talk strategies enable salespeople to control their thoughts, lead themselves, and regulate their goal focus and

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3 motivation. It has been found that thought patterns tend to be reflective of habitual thinking
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5 (Houghton et al., 2003). We suggest that when individuals repeat a certain chain of thoughts,
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7 they can contribute to the development of their constructive thought processes. Therefore,
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9 salespeople who engage in positive self-talk can influence their thought patterns and be more apt
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11 to self-leadership roles (Panagopoulos and Ogilvie, 2015).
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15 When salespeople engage in positive mental imagery, they envision themselves
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17 experiencing their desired outcomes of a specific behavioral process before actually performing
18
19 the necessary tasks for goal achievement (Houghton et al., 2003). Such determined focus on the
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21 desired state – as happens with positive mental imagery–allows salespeople to better monitor,
22
23 compare, and alter current and desired states. Mental imagery supports individuals in regulating
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25 their emotional states and future behaviors (Taylor et al., 1998). In turn, self-regulation allows
26
27 the reduction of discrepancies between current and desired states (Neck and Houghton, 2006).
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29 We argue that the ability of a salesperson to visualize one’s performance, success, potential
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31 challenges, and how to deal with such challenges would hold a positive impact on salespeople’s
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33 behaviors, specifically adaptive selling behavior.
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38 The third component of TSL comprises the individual’s ability to abolish or adjust
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40 dysfunctional beliefs (Neck et al., 1999). Through evaluating beliefs and assumptions,
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42 salespeople can actively promote positive thought processes by excluding the negative beliefs
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44 and assumptions related to dysfunctional thought processes (Neck and Manz, 1992). Some of a
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46 sales job’s characteristics can be either positive, negative, or a combination of both. They can
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48 influence a salesperson’s beliefs and assumptions about themselves and about their work
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50 environment. The ability to think about one’s beliefs and assumptions aids salespeople’s efforts
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52 to alter their sales approaches when they encounter challenges and difficulties in serving
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3 customers with different and sometimes unique needs. We suggest that a salesperson's ability to
4 evaluate beliefs and assumptions about his or her sales approach is more likely to alter his/her
5 behaviors with customers compared to salespeople who are not open to articulate and mentally
6 evaluate their selling behaviors.
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14 **Social Cognitive Theory of Self-regulation**

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17 Social cognitive theory of self-regulation and self-reflection will serve as the foundation of this
18 research (Williams, 1997). As noted by Bandura (1991), "The major self-regulative mechanism
19 operates through three principal sub-functions. These include self-monitoring of one's behavior,
20 its determinants, and its effects; judgments of one's behavior concerning personal standards and
21 environmental circumstances; and affective self-reaction" (p. 248). In other words, an
22 individual's behavior is explained in terms of a model in which behavior, cognitive, other
23 personal factors, and environmental events all interact as determinates of each other.
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34 Moreover, from a social cognitive perspective, an individual is defined in terms of
35 various capabilities such as symbolizing, vicarious capability, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and
36 self-reflection. In this study, we are focusing on two specific capabilities, self-regulation and
37 self-reflection, to examine and understand TSL strategies and their effects on adaptive selling
38 behavior.
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45 According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals can regulate their
46 behavior, especially when behavior is motivated and governed by an individual's internal
47 standards and personal reactions to such behavior. Also, individuals have abilities to influence
48 their surrounding environment through various cognitive processes of selection and creation of
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3 activities and situations (Bandura, 1986). Individuals operate as contributors to their behaviors,
4 motivations, and development within a network of reciprocally interacting influences.
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8 Self-regulation is often theorized as an idiographic processing routines and knowledge
9 structures formed by social interaction and culture (Boekaerts and Cascallar, 2006). According to
10 Markus and Cross (1990), an individual has different representations of the self, including the
11 ideal self, the possible self, and future selves. Such representations may comprise a strong
12 motivational component expressed by constructs such as life tasks or strivings (Emmons, 1992).
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19 However, self-constructs arise from plans pertinent to various aspects of the self. For
20 example, there is no single plan labeled “future self”. Instead, the individual's sense of future self
21 is dispersed across different plans relevant to future adaptation, such as those for monitoring life
22 trajectory and making preparations for a future career (Lavalley and Campbell, 1995). Thus, self-
23 regulation implements the functions of monitoring and promoting the attainment of one's
24 idiosyncratic goals.
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33 As noted by Bandura (1999, p. 2), “in the agentic socio-cognitive view, individuals are
34 self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating, not just reactive organisms shaped
35 and shepherded by external events; individuals have the power to influence their actions to
36 produce certain results”. Therefore, one must recognize the difference between the physical basis
37 of thought and its functional properties. Cognitive processes are not only emergent brain
38 activities; they also exert a critical influence. As proposed by Bandura (1999), “the human mind
39 is generative, creative, proactive, and self-reflective, not just reactive”. In other words,
40 individuals develop personal standards with actions and outcomes measured against these
41 standards. Discrepancies between actual performance and a personal standard result in
42 “evaluative self-reactions”. Further, such self-reactions impact future behavior. If the actions of
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3 an individual do not result in outcomes commensurate with internal standards, future actions are
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5 modified so that the probability of successful outcomes, as measured against internal standards,
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7 is enhanced (Bandura, 1991).
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10 In the context of self-regulation, however, individuals have to pay extra attention to their
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12 performance, the conditions under which they occur, and the short and long-term effects they
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14 produce (Bandura, 1991). Thus, success in self-regulation, to some extent, depends on the
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16 success of self-monitoring. To have a successful self-monitoring, one needs to have a particular
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18 characteristic, namely, self-reflection. As per social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986),
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20 individuals possess capabilities for reflective self-consciousness in which individuals exhibit an
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22 ability to analyze events and to cognate about their thought process. In other words, individuals
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24 develop understanding through reflection. Such reflections allow individuals to monitor their
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26 ideas and actions, predict outcomes or consequences, evaluate the adequacy of thoughts and
27
28 actions based on results, and modify thoughts and actions accordingly. For instance, when
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30 individuals observe their thought patterns, their behaviors, and the conditions under which these
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32 reactions occur, they begin to notice repeated patterns.
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38 By analyzing symmetries in the co-variation between situations, their thoughts, and their
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40 actions, people can identify the significant structures of their social environment that lead them
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42 to act in certain ways. Similarly, by altering their thoughts and behaviors, they can understand
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44 how their thinking affects their level of motivation and performance. Therefore, self-monitoring
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46 and thought self-leadership strategies are crucial in enlightening behavior alteration because they
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48 may occur as a reaction to internal or external prompts (Kanfer and Ackerman, 1989). For
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50 instance, based on social cognitive theory, Singh et al. (2017), examine the role of TSL in
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3 explaining self-efficacy levels in salespeople. The authors find that TSL strategies are powerful
4 tools and mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and salespeople performance.
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8 Individuals also differ in the extent to which they can and do monitor their expressive
9 behavior, self-presentation, and non-verbal emotional exhibition (Snyder, 1974). Individuals
10 with high self-monitoring are more likely very sensitive to situational and interpersonal cues to
11 behavioral appropriateness through regulation of their expressive self-presentation. Those
12 individuals seek to promote a desired public image. Individuals with low self-monitoring, on the
13 other hand, lack either the motivation or the ability to regulate their behaviors and are more
14 prone to displaying one's true dispositions and attitudes in every situation (Snyder, 1987, p. 46).
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24 25 **HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

26 27 **Thought self-leadership and adaptive selling behavior**

28
29 Adaptive selling behavior is one of the salesperson's capabilities that have been the focus of
30 prominent research streams in sales research. One stream examines adaptive selling as "the
31 altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on
32 perceived information about the nature of the selling situation" (Weitz et al., 1986, p. 175). This
33 approach enables salespeople to tailor messages and selling approaches to fit customers' needs
34 and preferences. Adaptive selling behavior could be said to be "one of the most prized behaviors
35 in the salesperson's arsenal" (Agnihotri et al., 2017, p. 27). A high level of adaptive selling
36 behavior is evident when salespeople employ various sales presentations and processes across
37 sales encounters and when they make alterations during the encounters. In general, adaptive
38 performance allows salespeople to create more value and satisfy customers (Itani et al., 2020). In
39 contrast, a low level of adaptive selling behavior is reflected by the use of the same sales
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3 approach and presentation in and during all or most of the sales encounters (Spiro and Weitz,
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5 1990).

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8 Thus, the basic notion is that there is no single best way to sell; an effective salesperson
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10 will be adaptive enough to select and implement a sales strategy depending upon the
11
12 characteristics of the prospective customer and situation. Also, salespeople can observe
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14 customers' reactions to a given sales pitch and make nearly instantaneous strategic adjustments.
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16 Accordingly, salespeople have the opportunity to collect information and then develop and
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18 implement a sales presentation tailored to the characteristics of each customer (Weitz et al.,
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20 1986).

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24 Weitz (1981) discussed adaptive selling behavior in his contingency model of salesperson
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26 effectiveness, and Spiro and Weitz (1990) advanced the concept further in their demonstration of
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28 the adaptive selling scale (ADAPTS). They argue that the benefits of adaptive selling behavior
29
30 are likely to outweigh the costs of gathering and responding to information under specific
31
32 circumstances, such as when the salesperson has the necessary resources, when buying tasks are
33
34 complex and may result in large orders, and when customer relationships have little conflict and
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36 are expected to continue in the future. Likewise, even simple adaptations in sales interactions,
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38 such as reactions to questions and body language may boost rapport and decrease objections.
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42 In their meta-analysis study, Franke and Park (2006) found that adaptive selling improves
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44 sales performance, whether measured by self-reported rating, manager ratings, or more objective
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46 measures of performance. Accordingly, adaptive selling is critical to organizational success due
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48 to its positive effect on salespersons' attitudes and behaviors. It is also critical to sales force
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50 performance because buyer-seller relationships are considerably strengthened when the
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52 salesperson listens to customers and responds by adjusting the sales strategy to fit individual
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customer's needs and preferences (Itani et al., 2019; Jaramillo et al., 2007; Marshall et al., 2003).

It is not surprising that marketing managers and scholars alike are interested in understanding and searching for factors that explain why some salespeople are more likely to engage in adaptive behaviors than others and how adaptive selling is created and encouraged (Román and Iacobucci, 2010).

Marketing researchers have established empirical evidence for numerous antecedents that enhance adaptive selling such as learning orientation (Park and Holloway, 2003), sales experience and training (Shoemaker and Johlke, 2002), knowledge and empowering leadership (Rapp et al., 2006), intrinsic motivation (Jaramillo et al., 2007), sales technology including CRM and social media tools (Rapp et al., 2008; Itani et al., 2017), sales-service ambidexterity (Agnihotri et al., 2017) and customer orientation (Itani et al., 2019).

Also, prior studies focus on the characteristics of the salespeople, such as ability, interest to understand behavior, self-introspection, and motivation—that can and will make salespeople perform well (e.g., Boorum et al., 1998; Jaramillo et al., 2007; Levy and Sharma, 1994; Park and Holloway, 2003; Sujana et al., 1994; Gist and Mitchell, 1992). This stream of research indicates that through thought self-abilities and intimate motivation, salespeople can adapt their selling and perform better. Therefore, we posit:

H1: TSL strategies will have a positive impact on a salesperson's adaptive selling behavior.

Self-monitoring and adaptive selling behavior

Self-monitoring can be referred to as personality capability that refers to one's ability to monitor and regulate one's attitudes and behaviors to accommodate external situations. Specifically, self-monitoring entails both the sensitivity to the expressive behavior of others and the ability to

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2
3 modify self-presentation (Lennox and Wolfe, 1984). In other words, for self-monitoring,
4
5 individuals must (1) initially be able to link their thought to their behavior, and (2) be motivated
6
7 to change their behavior to present a desirable self-image to others (Snyder, 1979). For instance,
8
9 before a salesperson can engage in a selling behavior (i.e., adaptive selling), s/he must have the
10
11 associated cognitive skills to elicit the behavior (Zschmelz et al., 2010). Therefore, self-
12
13 monitoring capability is a particularly relevant concept to salespeople (Dubinsky and Hartley,
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15 1986; Fine and Schumann, 1992; Bande Vilela et al., 2010).
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20 Prior literature considers self-monitoring as an essential process in the context of self-
21
22 regulation and highlights its role in self-influence and self-motivation mechanisms (Bandura,
23
24 1991). According to Dobbins et al. (1990), individuals with high self-monitoring capabilities are
25
26 able and willing to control their behaviors to improve their self-presentation following the social
27
28 demands of the situation. Additionally, as Bandura (1991) explains, individuals capable of
29
30 changing their behaviors are better able to initiate the process of constructive and corrective
31
32 change. Thus, individuals with high self-monitoring are more reactive to incongruence situations
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34 (Snyder and Gangestad, 1982) and more disposed to enact changes for movement toward desired
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36 end-states (Panagopoulos and Ogilvie, 2015).
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41 Aligned with this viewpoint, we argue that self-monitoring, as a psychological
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43 phenomenon, will motivate salespeople to devote more time and effort for handling sales
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45 encounters. Consequently, self-monitoring could be utilized as a vital personal resource that
46
47 allows salespeople to perform adaptive selling by tailoring the content and style of their sales
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49 interaction, presentation, and approach in a way that is best suited to the selling situation and
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51 customer type, needs, and behaviors.
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We posit that self-monitoring will enable a salesperson's adaptive selling behavior. That is, we propose that salespeople capable of being sensitive to the expressive behavior of customers will exert higher levels of adaptive selling behavior compared to salespeople lacking in this capability. Likewise, we argue that salespeople possessing the ability to modify self-presentation will display higher levels of adaptive selling behavior than those salespeople lacking this ability. Hence, we hypothesize the following:

H2a: Salesperson's sensitivity to expressions of others will have a positive impact on adaptive selling.

H2b: Salesperson's ability to modify self-presentation will have a positive impact on adaptive selling.

Moderating role of self-monitoring

Individuals differ in their sensitivity to contextual cues and in their ability to alter their behavior to the requirements of a situation (Snyder, 1979). Archetypical high self-monitors are sensitive to contextual cues and are able of intentionally altering their behavior for the sake of desired public image. They may read the nature of a situation, invoke an image of the type of person the situation calls for, and then utilize the invoked image as a guide to their behavior (Premeaux and Bedeian, 2003).

In this regard, individuals with high self-monitoring abilities tend to be very self-aware and play to their audience. An individual with high self-monitoring has been described as "someone who treats interactions with others as a dramatic performance designed to gain attention, make an impression, and at times entertain" (Snyder, 1987, p. 178).

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3 In contrast, individuals with low levels of self-monitoring tend to reflect only their inner
4 attitudes, emotions, and dispositions. Specifically, they have no desire to project what they
5 observe to be a false image of themselves (Gangestad and Snyder, 2000). Note that, however,
6 these individuals do use cues to guide their behaviors, but they do so for a different reason.
7 Rather than evaluating situations for guidance in how to project the desired appearance, they
8 search for situations that permit the display of their authentic selves. They do this through the
9 cognitive asking and behavioral answering of the question, “Who am I, and how can I be me in
10 this situation?” (Snyder, 1979, p. 103).
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21 Self-monitoring encompasses two dimensions; (1) the sensitivity to the expressive
22 behavior of others, and (2) the ability to modify self-presentation (Lennox and Wolfe, 1984). The
23 first dimension reflects an individual’s ability to be aware of and sensitive to pertinent situational
24 cues (verbal and nonverbal) given by people. Thus, a salesperson who can spot and interpret
25 his/her customer’s cues and emotions is more likely to be successful at knowing the appropriate
26 sales message and approach to use in a given sales interaction (Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka,
27 2007). The second dimension refers to the individual’s ability to adapt to the situation, so that
28 s/he behaves in a way that the desired image is portrayed (Snyder, 1974). Therefore, a
29 salesperson who can adjust his/her image is better prepared in tailoring his/her interactions and
30 appears more genuine to customers during the interaction process (Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka,
31 2007).
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47 Self-monitoring is expected to interact with several individual and contextual factors. For
48 instance, salespeople with a high level of self-monitoring will be more likely concerned with
49 enhancing their thoughts in a manner deliberately designed to project an image intended to
50 impress and satisfy customers (Snyder, 1987). Self-monitoring reflects a tendency to engage in
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3 and enhance individuals' performance (Snyder, 1987). However, adaptive selling behavior
4 characterized by certain levels of dealing with various customers' mindset, personality traits,
5 needs, and wants. Under these conditions, salespeople are the crucial actors in the adaptation
6 process; therefore, they should have personal characteristics to face and deal with various sales
7 encounter situations (Shah, 2015).
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12 Moreover, TSL represents a constellation of attitudes and cognitions which represent a
13 specific orientation and are a competence for leading oneself across challenging and performing
14 situations (Prussia et al., 1998; Houghton and Neck, 2002). Strategies such as positive self-talk,
15 improving self-belief systems, and using positive mental imagery play a positive role in the
16 salesperson's self-leading abilities (Singh et al., 2017). TSL will enable individuals to minimize
17 destructive thinking and to alter thought patterns in desirable ways (Houghton and Neck, 2002;
18 Manz and Sims 2001; Neck and Houghton, 2006).
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31 Hence, we expect that TSL interacts with self-monitoring in such a way that TSL
32 depends on the value and level of self-monitoring. Self-monitoring can have both direct and
33 indirect influences on salespeople's behaviors. We argue that salespeople known for their high
34 self-monitoring characteristics will be better in implementing TSL strategies when with
35 customers. Therefore, we expect a positive moderating effect of self-monitoring, which implies
36 that self-monitoring would manifest direct associations with adaptive selling behavior and will
37 strengthen the effect of TSL on adaptive selling behavior. This leads to the following hypothesis:
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46 **H3a:** Salesperson's sensitivity to expressions of others will positively moderate the relationship
47 between thought self-leadership and adaptive selling behavior.
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50 **H3b:** Salesperson's ability to modify self-presentation will positively moderate the relationship
51 between thought self-leadership and adaptive selling behavior.
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METHODOLOGY

Sample

To empirically test the hypothesized relationships, we collected data from large pharmaceutical companies located in India, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, Nepal, and Thailand. All participants were responsible for delivering key messages to medical practitioners and distributors with the least supervisory support. The pharmaceutical industry context is well suited to analyze our hypothesized model. According to Ahearne et al., 2008, pharma salespeople serve in a B2B setting and often work in isolation and time pressure. Consequently, self-monitoring and leadership strategies are critical for their success in sales outcomes (Ahearne et al., 2005).

After receiving a list of all the sales professionals from the firms, an electronic survey link on Qualtrics was sent out to 635 sales professionals in India, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, Nepal, and Thailand. After data inspection and removal of outliers falling outside the normal distribution range, 369 responses were received. Instead of using mean replacement or other methods to fill out some missing data in few responses, we decided to drop a total of 14 responses that were incomplete. The final sample used in the analysis is composed of 335 responses with 75.8% males and conspiring a 52.75% response rate. All respondents hold an undergraduate qualification majoring either in science or pharmacy with sales experience of a minimum of three years. Table 1 summarizes the general sales experience of the salespeople as well as tenure with their current firm. The sample was distributed across different age categories as follows: 7 (20-25 years), 134 (26-30 years), 158 (31-40 years), and 34 (greater than 40 years). Two of the respondents didn't report their age category.

Insert Table 1 about here

Measures

The measures were developed in prior studies in which reliability and validity were established (Appendix A). Since not all the measures were developed within the sales research, some measures were adapted with minor changes to fit the context of the study. The means, standard deviations, and correlations for the latent constructs are detailed in Table 2. Self-monitoring was operationalized as individuals' ability to regulate their behaviors with a purpose to accommodate external situations and their sensitivity toward others. Specifically, self-monitoring includes: sensitivity to the expressive behaviors of others construct [*exemplar item: I am often able to read people's true emotions correctly through their eyes*] and ability to modify self-presentation construct [*exemplar item: I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them*]. Salesperson's sensitivity to the expressive behaviors of others was assessed using a four-item scale, while a three-item scale was used to assess the salesperson's ability to modify self-presentation. Both measures were taken from the work of Lennox and Wolfe (1984).

TSL was operationalized as a salesperson's use and maintenance of one's constructive thoughts through specific mental strategies and assessed using an adapted scale from Houghton and Neck (2002). The TSL scale represents three latent factors including (1) positive self-talk was assessed using a three-item scale [*exemplar item: Sometimes I find I'm talking to myself (out loud or in my head) to help deal with difficult problems I face*]; (2) mental imagery was assessed using a five-item scale [*exemplar item: I use my imagination to picture myself performing well on important tasks*]; and (3) evaluation of dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions was assessed using a four-item scale [*exemplar item: I think about my own beliefs and assumptions whenever I encounter a difficult situation*].

Adaptive selling behavior was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Robinson et al. (2002). This scale captures the extent to which a salesperson can adapt or customize the selling style based on the behavior of the customer [*exemplar item: I like to experiment with different sales approaches*]. Also, and based on prior studies (Franke and Park, 2006; Goad and Jaramillo, 2014; Levy and Sharma, 1994), we controlled for the effects of salesperson job satisfaction, sales experience, age, and gender on adaptive selling behavior.

Insert Table 2 about here

Analysis

Data were analyzed using “Smart PLS 3.2.8” (Hair et al., 2013). PLS estimation is a variance-based partial least squares approach (Hair et al., 2013) and does not require data to be multivariate normally distributed. Additionally, PLS uses the bootstrapping method to specify the significance of the structural path coefficients. A measurement model, also known as the “outer model”, was first analyzed to examine the reliability and validity of the study’s constructs. Measures such as composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were also assessed for this purpose (Table 2). All items reflected significant factor loadings ($p < .01$). All CRs were above .75 level providing evidence of reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). These results provide evidence of the internal consistency of the measures utilized. The AVE values of the measures were above .5 level, demonstrating the existence of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2013). The square root of the AVE of each of the latent constructs exceeded the correlations a given construct has with other latent constructs in the model, providing evidence of discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

To detect the presence of nonresponse bias, we conducted a comparison between early and late respondents on each of the constructs to see if there is any significant difference between

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2
3 the two groups (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). Results show no significant differences for
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5 demographic and study variables between the two groups.
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8 To detect any presence of common method bias, the Harman's single factor method was
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10 used through conducting an exploratory factor analysis for a one-factor model. Findings didn't
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12 support the one-factor model as the variance explained in this model accounted for only 25%.
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14 Also, the "heterotrait-monotrait ratio" test (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015) was applied. The
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16 results show that none of the different HTMT pairs of the latent variables is greater than the
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18 cutoff level (.85), providing no evidence of common method bias.
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22 The marker factor method suggested by Lindell and Whitney (2001) was also utilized.
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24 The inclusion of 'ID number' assigned randomly to respondents was included in the model as a
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26 variable that is not theoretically related to any of the study factors. The ID number variable
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28 didn't hold any significant impact on the factors in the model. Moreover, none of the path
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30 coefficients has changed as a result of the addition of the marker variable. Further, collinearity
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32 was assessed. The highest variance inflation (VIF) factor was equal to 2.39, which is less than
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34 the 3.3 cutoff level (Kock, 2015). The tests conducted show no evidence of common method
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36 bias.
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39 40 **Results**

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42 The results are summarized in Table 2. In our analysis, we first tested a linear effects model.
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44 Consistent with H1, a positive relationship between TSL strategies and adaptive selling behavior
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46 was found ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$). Findings show support to H2a, which predicts that sensitivity to
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48 the expressive behaviors of others has a significant positive effect on adaptive selling behavior (β
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50 = 0.26, $p < 0.01$). In support of H2b, the ability to modify self-presentation was found to
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52 positively affect adaptive selling behavior ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$).
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3 While we do not hypothesize any relationship between self-monitoring (i.e. sensitivity to
4 expressive behaviors of others and ability to modify self-presentation) and TSL strategies as
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6 scholars have tested such relationship in the recent past (e.g., Panagopoulos and Ogilvie, 2015),
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8 we allow these relationships to be freely estimated in the current model. Consistent with
9
10 previous findings, we tested if a salesperson's (a) sensitivity to expressions of others and (b)
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12 ability to modify self-presentation will have a positive influence on the employment of TSL
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14 strategies. Findings show that sensitivity to the expressive behaviors of others ($\beta = 0.23$, $p <$
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16 0.01) and ability to modify self-presentation ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$) are positively related TSL
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18 strategies. Further, results from the linear effects model show a positive relationship between job
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20 satisfaction and adaptive selling behavior ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$).
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27 Insert Table 3 about here
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31 Second, we tested a moderated effects model in which we included two interaction terms
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33 to the linear effects model. The first interaction term is between the sensitivity of expressive
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35 behaviors of others and thought self-leadership strategies, and the second interaction term is
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37 between the ability to modify self-presentation and thought self-leadership strategies. Findings
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39 from the moderated effects model were in support of the linear effects found before. Similar
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41 results were found regarding H1a, H1b, and H2. Furthermore, the results support a positive
42
43 interaction effect between the sensitivity of expressive behaviors of others and thought self-
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45 leadership strategies on adaptive selling behavior ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$), providing support to H3a.
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47 The interaction effect between the ability to modify self-presentation and thought self-leadership
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49 on adaptive selling behavior is nonsignificant (H3b). To further understand the significant
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51 interaction effect found, we followed the procedures suggested by Aiken et al., (1991) to plot the
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3 positive moderating effect of the sensitivity of expressive behaviors of others on the relationship
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5 between thought self-leadership strategies and adaptive selling behavior (Figure 2). That is,
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7 salespeople with high TSL and high sensitivity to expressive behaviors are the salespeople who
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9 engage most in adaptive selling behavior.
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13 Insert Figure 2 about here
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18 **DISCUSSION**

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20 Although leadership in the sales domain attracts substantial attention, most studies examine it
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22 from a top-down perspective. Thus, contemporary research has aimed to enrich our knowledge
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24 of salespeople's self-monitoring and self-leading capabilities (e.g. Panagopoulos and Ogilvie,
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26 2015; Singh et al., 2017). We extend this line of research by underscoring self-monitoring and
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28 TSL as viable tools that hold promise for building an effective sales force. We anchor our
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30 research on the social cognitive theory of self-regulation (Bandura, 1991) and show that self-
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32 monitoring positively relates to adaptive selling behavior. We also show that TSL has a positive
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34 influence on adaptive selling behavior. The results also indicate that the salesperson's sensitivity
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36 to expressions of others positively moderates the relationship between TSL and adaptive selling
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38 behavior. Results from our study have significant theoretical implications, and we contribute to
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40 the extant sales literature in several ways.
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46 First, we demonstrate that adaptive selling behavior is driven by the salesperson's
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48 abilities to self-monitor and self-lead himself/herself through a cognitive process that could lead
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50 to higher levels of behavioral performance. Recently, several researchers have explored the role
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52 of positive psychology in enhancing the effectiveness of selling behaviors (Lyngdoh et al.,
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54 2018). Within this context of linking positive psychology to selling behaviors and outcomes, our
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3 study further strengthens its integration into a sales literature. Second, in the majority of studies
4 involving selling behaviors such as adaptive selling and customer-oriented selling, salesperson's
5 age and experience have been modeled as predictors (Franke and Park, 2006). We argue that
6 individual-level differences in cognitive abilities among salespeople explain the variance in
7 adaptive selling behavior more explicitly and informs our understanding of the alternative causes
8 of adaptive selling behavior. More importantly, we provide an alternative explanation for the
9 causal sequence outlined in the meta-analysis of adaptive selling behavior and customer
10 orientation (Franke and Park, 2006).
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21 Finally, our study findings provide support to the emerging discussion on salesperson's
22 macro-adaptive selling strategy, critical to a salesperson's ability to prospect for new customers
23 or gain more business from existing customers (Kwak et al., 2019). Thought-self leadership and
24 self-monitoring as drivers of adaptive selling behavior build a theoretical explanation to suggest
25 that salesperson level strategies structure a regulation mechanism to manage the sales
26 environmental uncertainties and guide salesperson's choice on the adaptive selling strategy.
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35 In conclusion, we argue that our study furthers the agenda for theory building around the
36 complexities of organizational transformation. As more firms find themselves at the cusp of such
37 transformation to build closer customer relationships, they need to make a departure from
38 traditional indicators for effectiveness (sales volume, revenue targets) and move to behavioral
39 performance such as adaptive selling behavior (Piercy and Lane, 2005).
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47 **Managerial implications**

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49 From a sales organization standpoint, the results of our study offer actionable insights for the
50 sales managers. First, managers should acknowledge that leading a 'driven' sales force is an
51 essential building block for a high-performance sales organization. With the growing interest in
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3 ideas relating to self-motivation, self-management, and self-regulation, this could provide the
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5 opportunity to build a team of self-leading salespeople. As our study suggests, investing in such
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7 initiatives to promote self-monitoring and TSL would lead to effective deployment of adaptive
8
9 sales behavior in sales interactions. Since TSL is a learned goal-setting behavior (Neck et al.,
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11 2010 ; Manz, 1986), salespeople can undergo behavioral skills training (Latham, 1989) and
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13 develop themselves as a self-led sales professional. We propose this managerial action to design
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15 and deliver such training interventions as part of the overall development strategy for the
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17 frontline salespeople.
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22 Second, by demonstrating the implications of self-monitoring and TSL effectiveness,
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24 evidence from this study suggests the use of empowerment programs for salespeople to increase
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26 individual sales outcomes. However, TSL and self-monitoring abilities can be used as positive
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28 markers while making hiring decisions for salespeople. Considering the role of self-monitoring
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30 in influencing adaptive selling behavior, organizations should pay more attention to salespeople
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32 that exhibit self-monitoring tendencies during the hiring process as salespeople vary in their
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34 ability to self-monitor (Snyder, 1979). Third, by fostering TSL and self-monitoring, sales
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36 organizations can develop a virtuous cycle of benefit for salespeople including self-efficacy and
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38 a greater sense of personal growth (Singh et al., 2019). Finally, sales managers must prepare
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40 themselves to respond effectively to the challenges posed by the rapid changes in the dynamic
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42 markets of contemporary selling. Therefore, creating a self-monitoring, self-leading continuously
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44 adapting sales force can provide a critical competitive edge for the sales organizations.
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49 **Study limitations and future research**

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51 Although we discover interesting insights into the effects of self-lead and self-monitor abilities,
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53 this study, as with most research, has certain limitations and offers exciting avenues for further
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3 research. First, data were from multiple companies and countries, but most of the participants
4 (62.7%) are from India. The rest are from countries such as Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia,
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6 Nepal, and Thailand. Therefore, this study might have been exposed to organizational and
7
8 cultural influence not controlled for in our analyses. Second, the majority of respondents are
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10 male, which might raise a concern relating to gender bias. Third, we did not consider any
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12 organization level variable that may have a significant influence on the adaptive selling behavior
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14 of the salespeople. Fourth, our research model did not explore the boundary conditions of the
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16 relationships between self-monitoring, TSL, and adaptive selling behavior. Several individual-
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18 level variables, such as the selling skills and political skills of a salesperson, might amplify or
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20 depress the strength of the relationships presented in our study.
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26 Accordingly, our study presents a significant and broad area for future research. Finally,
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28 the averages of the variables: salesperson's ability to modify self-presentation, salesperson's
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30 sensitivity to expressive behaviors of others, and adaptive selling behavior were relatively high
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32 raising an important point that need to be given thought to. While the three variables were
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34 normally distributed, it is important to take into account this point when considering the findings
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36 of these study.
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40 Further research should review our findings from a cross-cultural perspective. Moreover,
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42 we focus on TSL, which considers as one type of self-leadership strategies. It would be fruitful if
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44 future research investigates other types of self-leadership, such as behavioral-focused strategies
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46 and natural reward strategies (Houghton and Neck, 2002). Another prospect of future research
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48 could be in the domain of the emerging paradigm of value-based selling. Future research should
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50 explore the mechanism through which salespeople could engage in value-based selling and take
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52 responsibility for their customer's business (Singh et al., 2019).
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Figure 1: Hypothesized Model

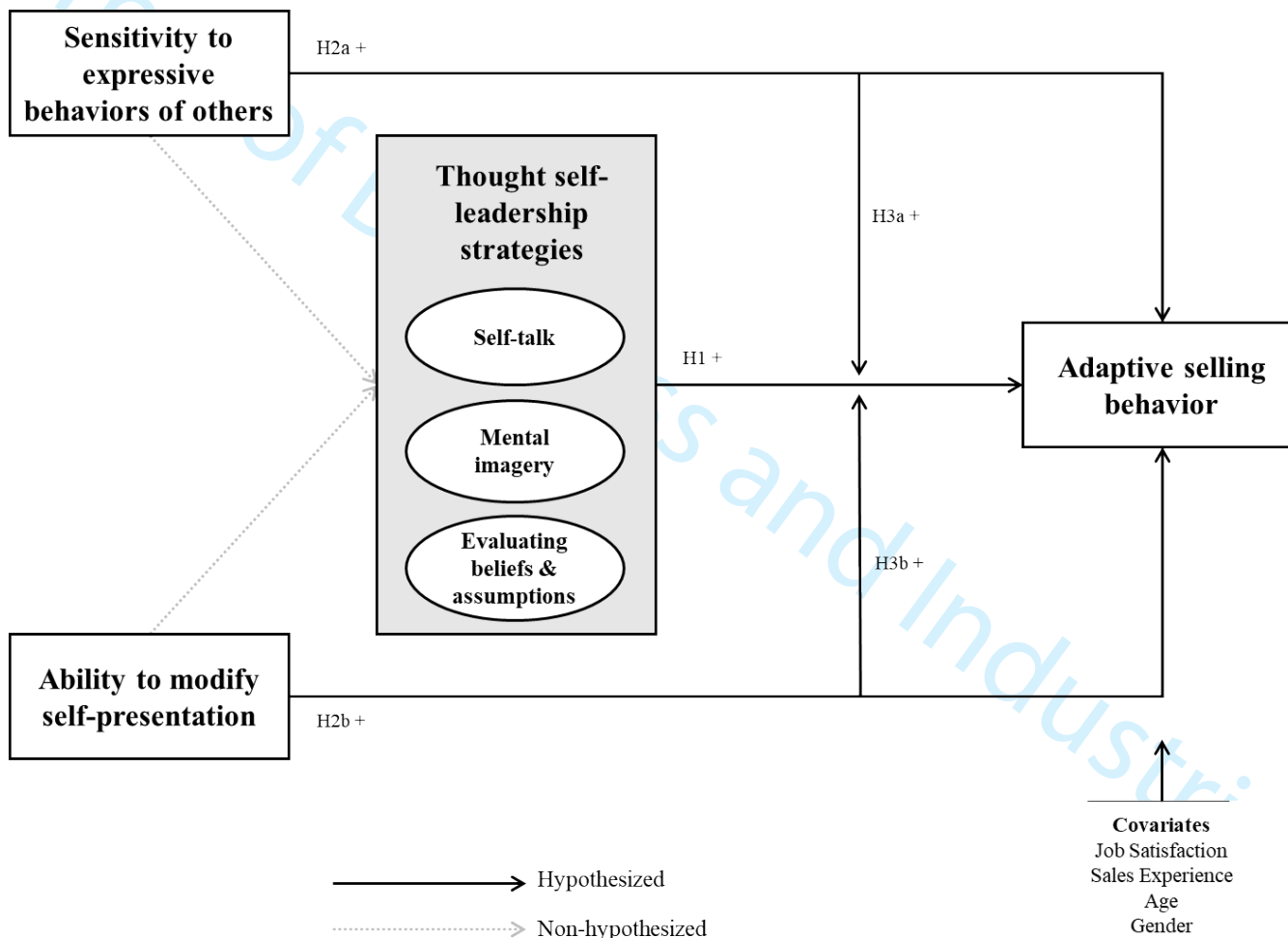


Figure 2: Moderating effect of sensitivity to expressive behaviors of other and thought self-leadership strategies on adaptive selling behavior

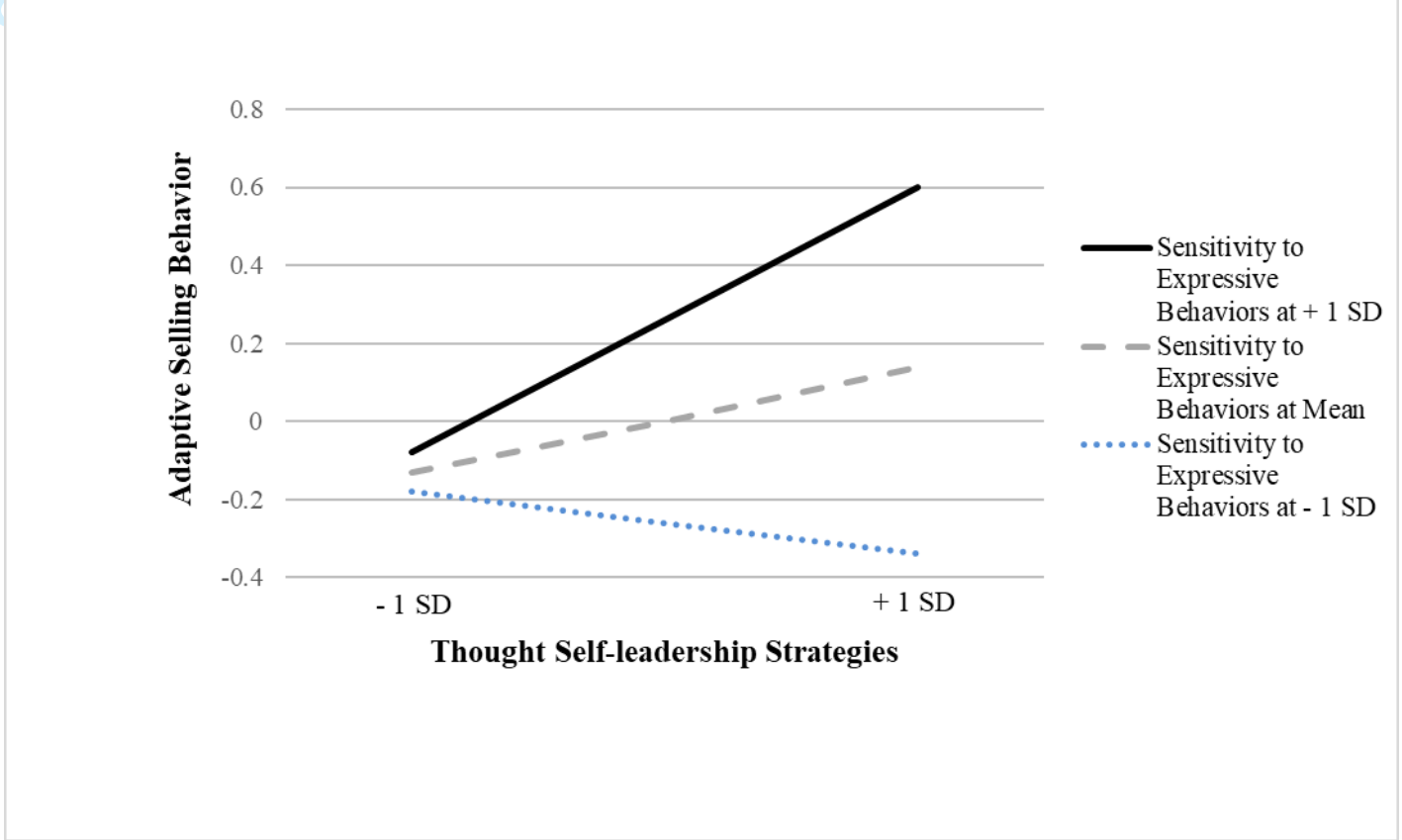


Table 1: Sample characteristics

	India	Singapore	Philippines	Malaysia	Nepal	Thailand	Total
Distribution of respondents	210	26	22	25	9	43	335
Sales Experience (Years)							
3-6	92	10	7	9	6	21	145
7-10	78	7	9	9	3	10	116
>10	40	9	6	7	0	12	74
Sales experience in current company							
0-3	49	5	6	6	5	10	81
3-6	129	14	10	13	4	22	192
>6	32	7	6	6	0	11	62

Table 2: Construct correlations, descriptive statistics and reliability

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean	SD	CR	AVE
1	TSL	.74							3.87	.56	.78	.55
2	ST	.623**	.84						3.78	.94	.88	.71
3	MI	.866**	.342**	.73					4.02	.61	.85	.53
4	EBA	.712**	.229**	.407**	.72				3.81	.72	.81	.52
5	SM-others	.372**	.180**	.331**	.291**	.75			3.97	.54	.84	.57
6	SM-self	.385**	.132*	.412**	.244**	.540**	.79		4.07	.56	.83	.62
7	ASB	.385**	.099	.402**	.286**	.488**	.510**	.79	4.22	.55	.83	.62
8	JS	.344**	.215**	.378**	.124*	.250**	.406**	.325**	4.15	.75	-	-

SM-others = Self-monitoring (sensitivity to expressive behaviors of others); SM-self = Self-monitoring (ability to modify self-presentation); ASB = Adaptive selling behavior; TSL = Thought self-leadership strategies; ST = Self-talk; MI = Mental imageries; EBA = Evaluating beliefs & assumptions; SE = Sales experience; JS = Job satisfaction. CR = Composite reliability; SD = Standard deviation; AVE= Average variance extracted. The square root of AVE is added on the diagonal.
 * p < .05; ** p < .01

Table 3: Results

Path	Linear effects model	T-value	Moderated effects model	T-value
Sensitivity to expressive behaviors of others → Adaptive selling behavior	.26**	4.85	.25**	4.53
Ability to modify self-presentation → Adaptive selling behavior	.27**	3.98	.21**	3.33
Thought self-leadership strategies → Adaptive selling behavior	.16*	2.68	.14*	2.22
Sensitivity to expressive behaviors of others → Thought self-leadership strategies	.23**	3.75	.23**	3.82
Ability to modify self-presentation → Thought self-leadership strategies	.26**	4.25	.26**	4.16
Sensitivity to expressive behaviors of others * Thought self-leadership strategies → Adaptive selling behavior	-		.19*	2.32
Ability to modify self-presentation * Thought self-leadership strategies → Adaptive selling behavior	-		-.01	.39
Job satisfaction → Adaptive selling behavior	.10*	1.99	.06	1.39
Age → Adaptive selling behavior	.08	1.23	.04	.48
Sales experience → Adaptive selling behavior	-.03	.49	-.01	.05
Gender (male = 0; female= 1) → Adaptive selling behavior	-.02	.37	-.02	.56

* p < .05; ** p < .01

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3 **Appendix A: Measurers**
4

5 Measurement	6 Loading
7 Self-monitoring: sensitivity to the expressive behaviors of others (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984)	
8 I am often able to read people's true emotions correctly through their eyes.	9 .78
10 In conversations, I am sensitive to even the slightest change in the facial expression of the person I'm conversing with.	11 .82
12 I can usually tell when I've said something inappropriate by reading it in the listener's eyes.	13 .76
14 If someone is lying to me, I usually know it at once from that person's manner of expression.	15 .66
16 Self-monitoring: ability to modify self-presentation (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984)	
17 I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them.	18 .76
19 When I feel that the image I am portraying isn't working, I can readily change it to something that does.	20 .86
21 I have found that I can adjust my behavior to meet the requirements of any situation I find myself in.	22 .75
23 Thought self- Leadership (Houghton and Neck, 2002)	
24 Mental Imageries	
25 I use my imagination to picture myself performing well on important tasks.	26 .53
27 I visualize myself successfully performing a task before I do it.	28 .80
29 Sometimes I picture in my mind a successful performance before I actually do a task	30 .80
31 I purposefully visualize myself overcoming the challenges I face.	32 .76
33 I often mentally rehearse the way I plan to deal with a challenge before I actually face the challenge.	34 .73
35 Self-talk	
36 Sometimes I find I'm talking to myself (out loud or in my head) to help deal with difficult problems I face.	37 .77
38 Sometimes I talk to myself (out loud or in my head) to work through difficult situations.	39 .86
40 When I'm in difficult situations I will sometimes talk to myself (out loud or in my head) to help me get through it.	41 .89
42 Evaluating beliefs and assumptions	
43 I think about my own beliefs and assumptions whenever I encounter a difficult situation.	44 .70
45 I try to mentally evaluate the accuracy of my own beliefs about situations I am having problems with.	46 .78
47 I openly articulate and evaluate my own assumptions when I have a disagreement with someone else.	48 .67
49 I think about and evaluate the beliefs and assumptions I hold.	50 .74
51 Adaptive Selling Behavior (Robinson et al., 2000)	
52 I like to experiment with different sales approaches.	53 .75
54 I am very flexible in the selling approach I use.	55 .81
56 I try to understand how one customer differs from another.	57 .80
58 <i>When I feel that my sales approach is not working, I can easily change to another.</i>	

59 *Item in italic was dropped.*
60