Career Satisfaction of Sales Professionals: The Role of Personality

Nancy A. Foster

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Nancy A. Foster entitled "Career Satisfaction of Sales Professionals: The Role of Personality." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

John W. Lounsbury, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Eric Sundstrom, Jacob Levy

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
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Abstract

According to P-E fit theory from a vocational psychology perspective (see Holland, 1985), individuals differ in their attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors, which in turn affect their career choices and their satisfaction with those choices. These differences, collectively termed “personality,” influence both work and life outcomes. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between personality traits and career satisfaction in a sample of sales professionals. An archival dataset was examined that included the “Big Five” and other work-related, narrow personality traits, as well as career satisfaction variables. All traits were significantly and positively related to career satisfaction except for Image Management, which was significantly, but negatively related to career satisfaction. The highest correlations were found between the measure of career satisfaction and emotional stability, optimism, and work drive. Implications for career planning and development, and personnel recruitment, selection, and training are discussed, along with future research recommendations.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The proposed study considers Holland’s theory of Person-Environment fit (Holland, 1985) as it relates to the role of personality traits and measures of career satisfaction in a sample of sales professionals. The sales role is an important one for the success of a business because a salesperson’s activities build the relationship between buyer and seller, and influence buyer’s attitudes and feelings of trust, loyalty and perceived value of the seller’s products and services (Selnes, 1998). In addition, a buyer’s commitment to a salesperson can influence their decision to purchase a product to the extent that they remain loyal to the firm that the salesperson represents, thereby helping the firm gain and retain market share (Macintosh & Lockshin, 1997).

It is estimated that U.S. firms spend $140 billion a year on their sales force, or nearly 7% of gross revenues (Godes, 2003). In fact, over 13 million Americans are employed in sales-related jobs and the field is expected to grow into the next decade (see http://www.bls.gov/). The Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts a demand for various sales positions across a variety of industries, suggesting a continuing need for valid and reliable selection, training and development tools. The use of personality traits provides a means with which to assess individual differences for the purpose of choosing the best person for the job. With a resurgence of personality assessment for personnel selection being seen in the last decade (see Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996), more researchers are exploring ways in which to use differential psychology to help meet career and workplace challenges. To date, most research on the sales profession has dealt with
human resources and management issues such as job performance (Sojka & Deeter-Schmelz, 2008; Vinchur, Schippmann, Switzer, & Roth, 1998), the buyer-seller relationship (Parsons, 2002; Saxe & Weitz, 1982), organizational commitment (Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1999), and employee retention (Futrell & Parasuraman, 1984; Johnston, Varadarajan, Futrell, & Sager, 1987).

Regarding satisfaction and personality variables in work-related contexts, there is much more research on job satisfaction than career satisfaction. By way of example, a review of the most current literature yields a meta analysis that examines job satisfaction and both Big Five traits and other individual difference constructs, such as locus of control and trait anxiety (Bruk-Lee, Khoury, Nixon, Goh, & Spector, 2009). Similarly, the most recent Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods includes a chapter on the status of dispositional characteristics and job satisfaction research in I/O psychology (Rafferty & Griffin, 2009), citing the continued interest in job satisfaction as a focus of study; however, career satisfaction is conspicuously absent from their discussion and overview.

In fact, relatively scant attention has been paid to the roles of personality and career satisfaction. Career satisfaction is thought to be important to both the employee and the organization because an individual’s personal success can eventually contribute to the success of the company for which they work (Judge & Higgins, 1999). Career satisfaction has been shown to correspond to a variety of important outcomes that influence an individual’s professional and personal life, such as work performance
(Wiggins & Bowman, 2000), burnout and stress (Kuerer et al., 2007), turnover (Igbaria, Greenhaus, & Parasuraman, 1991), organizational commitment (Carson, Carson, Phillips, & Roe, 1996), longevity (Kern, Friedman, Martin, Reynolds, & Luong, 2009), and overall well-being (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 1999). The investigation of career satisfaction in selected occupations has also been overlooked, with the exception of studies conducted by Judge and colleagues and Lounsbury and colleagues, who examined broad and narrow personality traits in relation to both job and career satisfaction (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995; Lounsbury et al., 2003; Lounsbury, Moffitt, Gibson, Drost, & Stevens, 2007; Lounsbury, Steel, Gibson, & Drost, 2008; Williamson, Pemberton, & Lounsbury, 2005). The present study investigates personality and satisfaction variables in a sample of sales professionals, and also seeks to extend a body of research examining the relationship between occupations and individual differences in personality traits and levels of career satisfaction.

Vocational Behavior and P-E Fit Theory: A Brief Overview

The examination of individual differences, considered here as personality traits, interests and preferences, has important implications for personnel selection and vocational choice across the lifespan. The P-E fit literature considers the role of individual differences, and is useful in providing a theoretical framework for the present study. The overarching premise of P-E fit is that people are more satisfied when they are in environments that are compatible with their own specific set of interests, attributes and personalities. The dominant theory guiding P-E fit research and practice is Holland’s
vocational interests typology (Holland, 1959, 1996). According to Holland, the closer the match between job environment characteristics and those of an individual, the stronger the congruence, and the more satisfaction and success a person will experience in his or her chosen career (Armstrong, Rounds, & Hubert, 2008; Holland, 1985). Holland’s vocational interests are divided into six categories: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (most often represented by the letters –RIASEC”). People have a propensity to a specific vocational personality based on their interests, which Holland calls stereotypes; a specific job category also has a specific profile. Both the individual and job profiles are represented by a letter code based on the rankings of an individual’s RIASEC scores. For example, an engineering position (according to the O*NET occupational taxonomy; see http://www.onetcenter.org), has been coded RIC, which would indicate a –realistic,” –investigative” and –conventional” work environment. According to Holland, people whose personalities share these qualities, or whose personalities align with that particular environment will experience success and satisfaction. In Holland’s view, vocational choice is an expression of personality; people are drawn to, selected into, and succeed within certain occupations based on their individual traits and vocational interests.

Holland’s vocational theory continues to receive various levels of support (Armstrong et al., 2008; Dik, Hu, & Hansen, 2007). Rottinghaus, Hees and Conrath (2009) recently examined satisfaction/dissatisfaction in the context of Holland themes in 22 independent samples of 9647 working adults and found support for Holland’s theory,
declaring that “these findings add to the five decades of research supporting the utility of Holland’s themes by demonstrating their relevance to job satisfaction” (p. 148).

A related approach to P-E fit that considers individual differences in the context of occupational choice is Schneider’s Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model (Schneider, 1987). The ASA model proposes that an organization has a distinct “personality” made up of the people who inhabit it. As a result, individuals who are attracted to, and subsequently hired and retained by an organization, have similar characteristics comprising a relatively homogenous group. The ASA model is a similar concept to Holland’s framework in that attraction to a particular occupation is a function of personality, and a lack of P-E fit will result in levels of dissatisfaction. In the context of the ASA model, dissatisfaction can eventually lead to turnover, a potentially negative and costly outcome for organizations, particularly in the sales field (Futrell & Parasuraman, 1984).

Personality

With regard to the “person” component of the P-E fit model, there are varied ways to assess individual characteristics for the purpose of assessing “fit.” Researchers and practitioners commonly use measurements of values, abilities, interests and personality to discriminate among individuals in an effort to predict and describe fit. The current study utilizes both broad and narrow personality traits to describe one’s unique way of feeling, thinking and behaving. Regarding broad traits in particular, I utilize the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality, which is widely considered a useful taxonomy.
for depicting individual differences (Costa & McCrae, 1995b; Digman, 1990; Wiggins & Pincus, 1992), and provides a parsimonious way in which to examine the “person” aspect of P-E fit.

**The Lexical Hypothesis**

The FFM, or the Big Five model, is based on the “lexical hypothesis” (see Goldberg, 1990), which proposes that the human behaviors of most cultural or social importance are directly proportional to the number of words invented to explain them. That is, human beings come up with adjectives that describe individual differences in the way people think, feel and act, especially when they consider them to be particularly explanatory and important. According to Goldberg (1982):

> Those individual differences that are most significant in the daily transactions of persons with each other become encoded into their language. The more important such a difference is, the more people will notice it and wish to talk of it, and with the result that eventually they will invent a word for it” (p. 204).

The lexical approach of personality theory can be traced to Galton (1884), one of the first researchers to use a dictionary with which to cull personality-related adjectives. Allport and Odbert (1936) and Norman (1967) further honed Galton’s work with later dictionary editions. However, Cattell (1943) is credited with condensing the enormous list into 35 variables and in essence, creating the first useful taxonomy. Perhaps owing to this more manageable number, the idea of a structural representation of personality became a topic of greater research interest. Fiske (1949), Tupes and Cristal (1961) and Norman (1967)
were among the first to arrive at a five-factor structure, which was eventually replicated by others (e.g. Borgatta, 1964), and today is referred to as the “Big Five.”

The Big Five

The Big Five factors posit that an individual’s personality, and the characteristics that define it, can be subsumed within the five-factor structure of agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (opposite of neuroticism), extraversion, and openness (Digman, 1990; John & Srivastava, 2001; McCrae & Costa, 1999). The Big Five have been found, in combination or on their own, to have meaningful and consistently replicated associations with many important and diverse life outcomes such as job performance (Barrick, Mount & Judge, 2001; Furnham & Fudge, 2008), academic achievement (O’Connor & Paunonen, 2007) and physical and mental health (Bogg & Roberts, 2004; Kendler, Kuhn, & Prescott, 2004). To date, measures of the Big Five have been studied in at least 15 languages (Zhou, Saucier, Gao, & Liu, 2009) and researchers have shown the factor structure to be generalizable across many cultures (Benet-Martínez & John, 1998; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Bermudez, Maslach, & Ruch, 2000; McCrae & Allik, 2002; McCrae & Costa, 1997).

Narrow Traits

The FFM has repeatedly proven to be a useful heuristic for organizing research in the personality domain (De Raad, Hendriks, & Hofstee, 1992). However, there is evidence to suggest that narrow traits can account for unique additional variance in validity criteria above and beyond the broad facets of the Big Five. The difference
between narrow versus broad traits can best be illustrated with a brief discussion of the "bandwidth-fidelity dilemma" (Cronbach & Gleser, 1965). In terms of personality research, the "dilemma" or debate concerns the idea of whether broad traits are better at predicting or explaining behavior than narrow traits. Broad, global traits (such as the Big Five factors of conscientiousness or extraversion) are thought to be comprehensive, theoretical and abstract, serving to describe a wide array of behaviors. In contrast, specific, narrow traits (such as achievement striving, a subfacet of conscientiousness, or talkativeness, a subfacet of extraversion) are more closely tied to observable, easily recognizable behaviors. For example, the dimension of agreeableness is a broad trait and can be described by many different adjectives. The qualities of being warm and altruistic are facets of agreeableness, but they are more specific and less ambiguous than the global trait itself. Because they are more specific descriptors they are more easily linked to specific behaviors that can be thought of as representing traits of warmth or altruism in an individual, such as giving money to charity or exhibiting organizational citizenship behaviors in the workplace. In looking at both narrow and broad traits from a fidelity-bandwidth perspective, a broad trait might be more appropriate when generalizing to global criterion such as job performance; a narrow trait may be better suited for identifying specific behaviors in a given dimension of job performance, such as written and oral communication ability (Schneider, Hough, & Dunnette, 1996).

Some researchers claim that the Big Five is too broad to be a useful predictor and make the case for more narrow-scope personality constructs (Ashton, 1998; Paunonen &
Jackson, 2000; Schneider et al., 1996). Although most, if not all, of the personality inventories in use today utilize the Big Five factors in varying degrees (McCrae & Costa, 1999), many also include other traits which are narrower in conceptual scope than the Big Five. The reasoning is that narrow traits will add predictive power, or incremental validity above and beyond that which can be accounted for by global factors, such as the Big Five (Ashton, Jackson, Paunonen, Helmes, & Rothstein, 1995; Stewart, 1999).

For purposes of the present study, both broad and narrow traits are examined in relation to career satisfaction. Career satisfaction is thought to be an important component of career success (Gattiker & Larwood, 1988; Judge & Higgins, 1999). Career satisfaction is similar to, but contrasts with the construct of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has been defined as a subjective, positive appraisal of one’s job situation (Locke, 1976), while career satisfaction is concerned with the subjective appraisal of all of the jobs held in a chosen profession and the subsequent satisfaction with one’s career as a whole (Judge & Higgins, 1999). This distinction is appropriate and useful in the context of vocational choice and P-E fit because the focus is on an individual’s selected, enduring career and the inherent personality characteristics that influence vocational decision-making across the lifespan.

To summarize, the present study utilizes Holland’s theory of vocational choice, Schneider’s ASA model, and the FFM as a means to investigate P-E fit using personality measures to assess variance in career satisfaction in a sample of sales professionals.
Career Satisfaction

Following Judge and Higgins (1999) career satisfaction is conceptualized in the present study as an individual's subjective appraisal of the level of success they have achieved with their career as a whole. As mentioned above, career satisfaction is a different construct than job satisfaction, as the latter focuses more specifically on a person’s occupation in a shorter time interval. Career satisfaction, on the other hand, is developmental in nature, changing throughout one’s lifespan; it is the sum of one’s feelings about a lifetime of work (Lounsbury et al., 2008).

A number of studies have focused on the importance of career satisfaction to work-related outcomes. For example, significant correlations have been found relating quality of care and patient outcomes to career satisfaction in samples of physicians in a variety of specialties (Leigh, Kravitz, Schembri, Samuels, & Mobley, 2002). Kravitz, Leigh, Samuels, Schembri, and Gilbert (2003) studied obstetrics and gynecology practitioners, a specialty considered to have among the lowest satisfaction rates among all physicians (Leigh et al., 2002), and found that feelings of dissatisfaction among obstetricians and gynecologists resulted in lower patient satisfaction. DiMatteo and her colleagues (1993) considered the role of career satisfaction with patient adherence to treatment, and found that physicians who were happiest in their careers had patients who were more willing to follow treatment instructions. As DiMatteo et al. suggest, this is an important finding because there appears to be a consistent relationship between high
levels of career satisfaction among practitioners and high levels of satisfaction among their patients, which subsequently leads to better care.

Examining other occupational fields, Igbaria and colleagues (1991) found that higher career satisfaction levels among management information science (MIS) professionals were associated with a lower degree of turnover intentions and higher levels of organizational commitment. A relationship between career satisfaction and employee attrition is a particularly salient finding in the MIS field in which turnover is acknowledged to be a costly and disruptive problem (Jiang & Klein, 1999). Lee, Carswell, and Allen (2000) found that people who were more satisfied with their careers were more likely to display higher levels of organizational commitment and stay with their jobs longer, thus lowering their turnover rate in the organization. Finally, Boies and Rothstein (2002) investigated the motivating factors and attitudes influencing the willingness to accept international assignments in a sample of Canadian managers. They found that managers with higher levels of career satisfaction were more emotionally invested in their occupation, and therefore, more ambitious and motivated to achieve.

Personality and Satisfaction

There have been numerous studies in recent years investigating the relationship between personality and satisfaction. For example, factors related to intrinsic career success (operationalized as job, life and career satisfaction) in a sample of U.S. and European executives were investigated by Boudreau, Boswell and Judge (2001). Using the NEO-FFI Big Five scale (Costa & McCrae, 1992), they found that career satisfaction
was positively related to extraversion and negatively related to neuroticism in both samples, and negatively related to conscientiousness among the American participants.

In a sample of employees from various occupational backgrounds, Seibert and Kraimer (2001) found significant, positive associations between career satisfaction and extraversion, and negative relationships between both emotional stability and agreeableness, and career satisfaction. Ng, Eby, Sorensen and Feldman (2005) conducted a meta-analytic study that examined individual differences as predictors of intrinsic career success. Ng et al. (2005) found significant correlations with all Big Five personality variables, although it was not clear precisely how career satisfaction was measured or which occupations were sampled. Sutin, Costa, Miech and Eaton (2009) conducted a longitudinal study examining the role of Big Five and facet scale personality variables and career success (operationalized as a single item measure of job satisfaction), and found significant relationships with neuroticism and extraversion. Again, specific occupations were not distinguished.

In terms of looking at both broad and narrow personality traits as predictors of career satisfaction, Lounsbury, Loveland, Sundstrom, Gibson, Drost, and Hamrick (2003) found that emotional resilience, optimism, and work drive were positively related to career satisfaction across 14 different occupational groups. In addition, they found that the Big Five traits of conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness and other, narrower traits, such as assertiveness, customer service orientation, and human managerial relations orientation correlated with career satisfaction in some groups, but not others.
There have also been several studies focusing on specific occupations. For example, in a study of IT professionals, Lounsbury and colleagues (2007), found that assertiveness, emotional resilience, extraversion, openness, teamwork disposition, customer service orientation, optimism, and work drive were significant predictor variables for career satisfaction. Also, in a study of personality traits and satisfaction in a sample of librarians and other “information professionals,” Williamson, Pemberton, and Lounsbury (2005) found significant relationships between career satisfaction and the variables of optimism, work drive, emotional resilience, and assertiveness.

**Personality and the Sales Profession**

Generally, the majority of studies concerning the sales profession in the context of differential measures involve the relationship between personality traits and sales performance or personality traits and job satisfaction. Barrick and Mount (1991) found significant, positive relationships between sales performance and both extraversion and conscientiousness, but non-significant relationships between sales performance and either emotional stability or openness. Looking at performance and Big Five dimensions seventeen years later, Furnham and Fudge (2008) reported significant correlations with performance and conscientiousness, openness and agreeableness, but not extraversion or emotional stability in a sample of sales consultants. Conte and Gintoft (2005) found that salespeople who were high in extraversion had better supervisory ratings in customer service and overall sales performance. Similarly, results of a meta analysis (Vinchur et al., 1998) showed a positive relationship between achievement, a facet of
conscientiousness, and performance. Using samples of salespeople from two insurance companies, Seligman and Schulman (1986) reported positive relationships between optimism (a narrow trait associated with extraversion) and sales productivity, with optimistic salespeople selling 35% more than those with pessimistic expectations. That same study showed that optimists were less likely to leave the organization than pessimists. Interestingly, the majority of recent research on sales-specific samples and personality can be found in unpublished dissertation research, especially in Asian cultures (Chen, 2006; Chen, 2005; Lin, 2006).

Sometimes the relationship between personality and the criteria of interest is more complex. In a study of Big Five and narrow traits of salesmen, Warr, Bartram and Martin (2005) found that sales performance was related to achievement orientation, a facet of conscientiousness, rather than to the global trait of conscientiousness itself. Similarly, the broad factor of extraversion was not found to be significantly related to sales, but the extraversion subscale factor of potency was significantly and positively related to sales performance. Stewart (1996) found that conscientiousness and extraversion were both significantly, positively related to high sales performance. However, the extraversion-performance relationship was only correlated when explicit rewards were offered; the conscientiousness-performance relationship held, regardless of reward expectations. Based on the above review, it appears that the proposed study can fill a gap in the sales literature by investigating the role of broad and narrow personality traits in relation to career satisfaction of sales professionals.
CHAPTER II
THE PRESENT STUDY

Rationale

Holland’s vocational theory and Schneider’s ASA model provide the framework with which to investigate the differential affects of personality characteristics on career satisfaction. Both theories share the premise that people will gravitate toward, be selected into, and remain satisfied in occupations that provide the best “fit” for their personality characteristics and the personality of their work environment. The Big Five was chosen to assess the traits of the present study’s sample because it is a widely accepted taxonomy across multiple investigative domains and has become a useful heuristic with which to organize research in the study of personality.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The dataset in the proposed study includes a collection of personality variables from individuals in a variety of occupations. This study investigates broad and narrow traits conceptualized as being important components of sales role activities; consequently, individuals with higher levels of those traits are more likely to experience higher levels of satisfaction. With regard to the Big Five traits, the first research question to be addressed is: RQ1: Which broad, Big Five personality traits are related to career satisfaction among sales professionals?

Looking more closely at specific Big Five dimensions and their relationship to career satisfaction, the present study utilizes Barrick, Mount and Gupta’s approach
(2003) supporting the use of logical deduction in hypothesis formation. Because personality traits and Holland’s RIASEC typology share considerable overlap, directional hypotheses can be advanced using a deductive process. For example, Holland codes describe salespeople and their associated work environments as being “people-oriented.” The Big Five trait of extraversion is conceptualized as “the tendency to be social and talkative.” Inasmuch as these constructs overlap, specific predictions can be advanced.

For the purpose of the present study, I conducted a review of the literature and found mixed results as to the relationship between career satisfaction and the traits of agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness (see Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007). However, there are findings relating extraversion and emotional stability to career satisfaction (Boudreau et al., 2001; Lounsbury et al., 2003; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001).

According to Holland’s codes, which represent the most dominant personality types associated with a given occupational environment (Holland, Powell, & Fritzsche, 1994), sales occupations are inherently “enterprising,” and require qualities of extraversion, such as persuasion and sociability. Based on the rationale that sales environments require the trait of extraversion, the proposed study advances the following research hypotheses:

- **H1:** Extraversion will be positively related to career satisfaction among sales professionals.

With regard to emotional stability, although it hasn’t been studied in conjunction with the sales profession per se, components of emotional stability, such as stress
tolerance and the ability to control emotions, are among the core competencies associated with the sales profession (www.onetcenter.org). Previous research has found that career satisfaction is positively related to extraversion and emotional stability in a variety of occupations (Boudreau et al., 2001; Lounsbury et al., 2003; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). Thus, it is expected that the relationship between other occupations and emotional stability will generalize to members of the sales profession as well. Accordingly, the proposed study investigates the following hypothesis:

- H2: Emotional stability will be positively associated with career satisfaction among sales professionals.

The present study also utilizes non Big-Five traits to examine the personality-satisfaction relationship. Considering which personality traits relate to career satisfaction, previous researchers have argued the importance of using non-Big Five traits to explain or predict behavior (e.g. Ashton, 1998; Hough, 1992; Paunonen & Jackson, 2000). Because the present study utilized a large database of both broad and narrow traits, it enables me to explore the following research question, "RQ2: Which narrow traits are significantly related to career satisfaction?"

Career satisfaction and narrow personality traits have not previously been studied in the context of sales-related jobs, but they have been investigated in the context of other professions. Lounsbury and colleagues reported positive associations between career satisfaction and assertiveness, customer service orientation, optimism and work drive in a sample comprised of 14 occupational groups (Lounsbury et al., 2003). Similar results
were found in a sample of IT professionals (Lounsbury et al., 2007) and librarians (Williamson et al., 2005). Such results carry implications for traits that distinguish sales occupations. For example, members of the sales profession are primarily Enterprising individuals whose work roles require personal initiative and social boldness (Holland et al., 1994). Successful salespeople are typically self-starters who work in a variety of settings and can approach strangers for the purpose of initiating a buyer-seller relationship. Further, most sales professionals need to be persuasive and use interpersonal influence to be successful. These trait descriptors align closely with the narrow trait of assertiveness, defined in the present study as —the disposition to express ideas and opinions, take initiative and exert influence.” Also, Rasmusson (1999) ranked assertiveness as one of most important traits a successful salesperson can have.

Accordingly, one would expect a positive relationship between assertiveness and sales success. Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced:

- H3: Assertiveness will be positively associated with career satisfaction among sales professionals.

With regard to the importance of customer service orientation to the field of sales, Holland types identify sales professions and their associated environments as —Social,” people-oriented, helpful, and cooperative (Holland, 1996). This description corresponds well to the narrow trait of customer service orientation, defined in the current study as —striving to provide personalized, quality service to, and putting the customer first.”
Inasmuch as the customer focus is an integral part of the sales job, this study investigates the following hypothesis:

- **H4**: Customer service orientation will be positively associated with career satisfaction among sales professionals.

Turning to the narrow trait of optimism, Seligman and Schulman (1986) found that sales professionals who scored higher on optimism outperformed sales professionals who scored lower on optimism. In addition, O*NET (2009) describes “perseverance in the face of obstacles” as a core competency for those engaged in the sales profession, and similarly, the present study defines optimism as “having an upbeat, hopeful outlook, as well as a tendency to minimize problems and persist in the face of setbacks.” Accordingly, a useful personality trait in sales is the tendency to remain optimistic even in the face of failure (missed sales opportunities) and move on to the next prospect. Consequently, the fifth hypothesis follows:

- **H5**: Optimism will be positively related to career satisfaction among sales professionals.

Another core competency of people engaged in the sales role is that of “achievement orientation,” which O*NET (2009) describes as demonstrating a willingness to take on challenges. Also, “Enterprising” types, an integral element in the Holland code for sales jobs, are considered to be ambitious (Holland et al., 1994). These descriptors align well with the narrow trait of work drive, which is conceptualized in the present study as the “disposition to work for long hours and investing high levels of time...
and energy into job and career.” Given that success in selling requires higher levels of effort and achievement, the following hypothesis was advanced:

- **H6:** Work drive will be positively related to career satisfaction among sales professionals.

Lastly, image management refers to an individual’s self-presentation behaviors, and their desire to use environmental cues in ways that will help them adapt to a situation and create a positive image in the presence of others. In the sales context, this trait would relate to performance because of the need to build customer relationships as a means to closing sales. O*NET (2009) specifies “social perceptiveness” as a core sales competency, defined as “being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do.” In addition, researchers have found that self-monitoring, a closely related concept, is a trait associated with socially oriented positions such as sales and marketing (Day & Kilduff, 2003). It was also found to have positive effects on adaptive selling (i.e. using different selling presentations depending on the selling situation) due to the increased ability on the part of the salesperson to read the situation and modify their own behavior to match customer needs and expectations (Widmier, 2002). Inasmuch as a salesperson needs the ability to use interpersonal cues and manage one’s self-presentation to adapt to changing situations and build relationships, the following hypothesis is investigated:

- **H7:** Image management will be positively associated with career satisfaction among sales professionals.
The final research question (R3) investigates the meaningfulness of trait score magnitude and breadth of traits on levels of career satisfaction. If, for example, the Big Five traits of extraversion and emotional stability are found to be statistically significant when related to career satisfaction, are there differences between the “high” and “low” scorers on those traits? Based on Holland’s theory of P-E fit, we would expect that there would be a positive linear relationship between levels of scores, in that low scorers on both narrow and broad traits report lower scores of career satisfaction and high scorers report higher satisfaction scores. Further, the current study explores differences between individuals on career satisfaction levels depending upon the number of personality traits they possess that are also found to relate to career satisfaction. The goal is to investigate the existence of a trait profile that indicates career satisfaction among sales professionals based on the number of traits they possess that relate to career satisfaction as measured in this study.

Methods & Measures

Participants

The data for this study were acquired by permission and selected from a large archival database created by eCareerfit.com, an Internet organization that specializes in providing personality-based assessments to companies for employee planning, placement and development purposes. The sample includes responses from 593 individuals who listed sales as their current or most recent occupation. The definition of a “sales job” was based on O*NET’s widely-used job classification system. O*NET’s code 41 corresponds
to the job family called “Sales and Related,” and refers to an individual who sells goods or services as his/her core job role. Data were collected from March of 2003 to January of 2008.

Of the total sample of 593 participants, 63% were male; 37% were female. Relative frequencies by age group were: Under 30—11%; 30-39—28%; 40-49—36%, 50-59—22% and over 60—3%. Race/ethnic data were not available. The most common job titles were Account Executive, Account Manager and Sales Representatives. Respondents came from many different industries including retail-wholesale (15%), consumer products (14%), telecommunications (10%), technology services (9%), financial services (7%), manufacturing (7%), professional services (7%), health care (4%), science (3%), communications (2%), durable goods (2%), oil, gas and petroleum (2%), and printing and publishing (2%).

Measures

Personality Traits

The personality inventory used in this data source was the Personal Style Inventory (PSI), a normal, work-based personality inventory developed by Resource Associates, Inc. It has been used in a variety of settings internationally, mainly for career development and pre-employment screening purposes. Reliability and validity information on the PSI is provided by Lounsbury and Gibson (2006; 2003; 2007; 2008).
A brief description of each of the personality constructs examined in the present study is given below along with the number of items in each scale and Cronbach’s coefficient alpha.

**Big Five**

- **Agreeableness/Teamwork Disposition**: propensity for working as part of a team and functioning cooperatively on work group efforts. Coefficient alpha = .83.
- **Conscientiousness**: dependability, reliability, trustworthiness, and inclination to adhere to company norms, rules, and values. Coefficient alpha = .77.
- **Emotional Resilience/Stability**: overall level of adjustment and emotional resilience in the face of job stress and pressure. Coefficient alpha = .81.
- **Extraversion**: tendency to be sociable, outgoing, gregarious, expressive, warmhearted, and talkative. Coefficient alpha = .82.
- **Openness**: receptivity/openness to change, innovation, novel experience, and new learning. Coefficient alpha = .81.

**Narrow Traits**

- **Assertiveness**: a person’s disposition to speak up on matters of importance, expressing ideas and opinions confidently, defending personal beliefs, seizing the initiative, and exerting influence in a forthright, but not aggressive, manner. A facet of extraversion. Coefficient alpha = .79.
• Customer Service Orientation: striving to provide highly responsive, personalized, quality service to customers; putting the customer first; and trying to make the customer satisfied, even if it means going above and beyond the normal job description or policy. A combination of conscientiousness and agreeableness, and low neuroticism. Coefficient alpha = .70.

• Image Management: reflects a person’s disposition to monitor, observe, regulate, and control the self-presentation and image s/he projects during interactions with other people. Similar to self-monitoring, a facet of extroversion. Coefficient alpha = .79.

• Optimism: having an upbeat, hopeful outlook, concerning situations, people, prospects, and the future, even in the face of difficulty and adversity; a tendency to minimize problems and persist in the face of setbacks. Related to lower neuroticism and higher extroversion. Coefficient alpha = .83.

• Work Drive: disposition to work for long hours (including overtime) and an irregular schedule; investing high levels of time and energy into job and career, and being motivated to extend oneself, if necessary, to finish projects, meet deadlines, be productive, and achieve job success. Related to conscientiousness. Coefficient alpha = .81.

Career Satisfaction

Career satisfaction was measured using a seven-item questionnaire with items addressing issues such as career advancement, future prospects, and career satisfaction as
a whole. Responses for each item were made on a 5 point scale, with opposite anchors on each end. For example, “To tell the truth, I think my career is going nowhere” versus “I feel like my career has tremendous potential.” The scale have been shown to display sound reliability and extensive construct validity (e.g. Lounsbury, Gibson, Steel, Sundstrom, & Loveland, 2004). Coefficient alpha for the career satisfaction scale = .81.
CHAPTER III
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The first and second research question (RQ1 and RQ2) and all directional
hypotheses examined the relationship between broad personality traits and career
satisfaction in a sample of sales professionals and yielded significant results. Pearson
correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between career
satisfaction and the study’s personality variables. The correlation coefficients for the
sample of sales professionals (N=593) are displayed in Table 1. Career satisfaction was
significantly and positively related to all of the Big Five traits. Correlations ranged in
magnitude from $r=.42$ ($p<01$) for emotional stability to $r=.17$ ($p<.01$) for agreeableness.
Career satisfaction was significantly related to all five narrow traits, ranging in magnitude
from $r=.37$ ($p<.01$) for work drive to $r=.10$ ($p<.01$) for customer service orientation.
All correlations were positive, except for image management ($r=-.15, p<.01$).

The third research question (RQ3) explored how a salesperson-satisfaction profile
is related to career satisfaction. The profile was created by compiling a composite index
of the nine traits found to be significantly and positively related to career satisfaction in
this study (Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Extraversion, Openness,
Teamwork/Agreeableness, Assertiveness, Customer Service Orientation, Optimism and
Work Drive). The index was produced by setting cutoffs on each personality trait based
on the 75th percentile of scores (scores at or above the 75th percentile score were
considered “high” and assigned a score of 1 while those below the 75th percentile were
assigned a value of 0 and considered “low”). Composite scores for each person were computed by adding all nine scores together. A personality profile score was considered “low” if the individual had a 0-3 composite score, “average” if the composite trait score was 4-6, and “high” if the composite score was 6-9. The cutoffs used for each trait are displayed in Table 3.

Looking more closely at the personality profiles, Table 4 and Figure 1 show descriptive statistics and score distributions for the profile scores and composite scores. The mean profile score was 2.43, suggesting that most respondents had strong trait scores in three or fewer of nine traits. A score of 0-3, as conceptualized in the present study, corresponded to a “low” personality-satisfaction profile (0-3 traits were “low,” 4-6 traits “medium” and 7-9 traits “high”). A low score did not signify the lack of a trait, but rather, a lesser degree of self reported trait score magnitude. Results of an ANOVA comparing career satisfaction and profile scores (low, medium and high groups) revealed significant differences between groups in mean satisfaction scores (see Table 5). Further, as can be seen in a graph a graph of the data points (N=593) relating profile score to career satisfaction, there was a monotonic, positive linear relationship between number of high trait scores and mean levels of career satisfaction (See Figure 2).
### Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Std Error Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness-Thoughtful</td>
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<td>Teamwork</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
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<td>.80039</td>
<td>.03287</td>
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<td>.02351</td>
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<td>Orientation</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.66337</td>
<td>.02724</td>
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<td>.83504</td>
<td>.03429</td>
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<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
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<td>.65227</td>
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<td>Optimism</td>
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<td>.75946</td>
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<td>Std Deviation</td>
<td>Std Error Mean</td>
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<td>Optimism</td>
<td>3.917</td>
<td>.75946</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Drive</td>
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<td>.80441</td>
<td>.03303</td>
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N=593
Table 2
Personality trait and satisfaction correlations

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<th>Personality Trait</th>
<th>Career Satisfaction</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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<td>Agreeableness-Teamwork</td>
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<td>.000</td>
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<td>Assertiveness</td>
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<td>.223</td>
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<td>.227</td>
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<td>.021</td>
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<td>.418</td>
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<td>.240</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image Management</td>
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<td>-.152</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
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<td>.241</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>Optimism</td>
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<td>.347</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Drive</td>
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<td>.374</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
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<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.000</td>
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N=593
Table 3
Trait means and profiles

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Variance</th>
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<th>50</th>
<th>75</th>
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<tr>
<td>Agreeableness-Teamwork</td>
<td>3.500</td>
<td>.507</td>
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<td>3.57</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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<td>Assertiveness</td>
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<td>.641</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>4.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
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<td>.521</td>
<td>2.88</td>
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<td>3.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer Service Orientation</td>
<td>4.374</td>
<td>.328</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
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<td>.506</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>3.992</td>
<td>.440</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image Management</td>
<td>2.801</td>
<td>.697</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>2.83</td>
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<td>Openness</td>
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<td>.425</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>4.22</td>
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<td>Optimism</td>
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<td>.577</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Drive</td>
<td>3.404</td>
<td>.647</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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N=593
Table 4
Descriptive statistics for sales trait profile score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Satisfaction</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>3.1125</td>
<td>.91396</td>
<td>.04352</td>
<td>3.0269</td>
<td>3.1980</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.9719</td>
<td>.88367</td>
<td>.08033</td>
<td>3.8128</td>
<td>4.1310</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.2387</td>
<td>.87089</td>
<td>.15642</td>
<td>3.9193</td>
<td>4.5582</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>3.3467</td>
<td>.98995</td>
<td>.04065</td>
<td>3.2669</td>
<td>3.4266</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Figure 1. Profile Score Histogram
Table 5
Results for profile scores and career satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>96.157</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>48.078</td>
<td>58.608</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>483.999</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>.820</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>580.156</td>
<td>592</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Means Plot of Profile score and Career Satisfaction
Discussion

The first research question examined Big Five traits and career satisfaction. Significant correlations were found for all five traits; the strongest relationships were found with emotional stability and extraversion, providing support for the first two hypotheses. For Hypothesis 1, positive associations between extraversion and career satisfaction of sales professionals were predicted and confirmed. The latter result is consistent with O*NET Resource Center’s description of sales job attributes, which specifies RIASEC code –ECS” representing, respectively, the traits of Enterprising, Conventional and Social, as those most closely associated with sales positions in general, including Sales Manager, Telemarketer, Account Representative and Insurance Sales Agent (www.onenetcenter.org). Extraversion is a core –Enterprising” trait, described in the present study as —the tendency to be sociable, outgoing, gregarious, expressive, warmhearted, and talkative.” Salespeople are expected to interact with new and existing customers in all phases of the sales process. A salesperson’s livelihood depends on his or her ability to approach, engage and earn the trust of other people. To the extent that extraverted individuals are attracted to and recruited for the sales profession and extraversion characteristics are key components of success in the sales role, a positive association between extraversion and success supports Holland’s vocational theory of personality-job environment fit. Furthermore, high levels of extraversion, especially the facet of influence or persuasion (Warr et al., 2005), have been linked to important sales behaviors and outcomes such as job performance, positive supervisor ratings, and sales
volume (Conte & Gintoft, 2005; Stewart, 1996). In addition, other researchers have observed similar, positive correlations between extraversion and career satisfaction (Boudreau et al., 2001; Lounsbury et al., 2003; Ng et al., 2005; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001).

The second hypothesis predicted a positive association between emotional stability and career satisfaction, which was supported by the present findings. Individuals with higher levels of emotional stability are better suited to the numerous job demands of the sales environment, such as being able to "deal calmly and effectively with high stress situations" and "maintaining composure and keeping emotions in check" (O*NET, 2009). Sales positions almost always involve periods of failure and rejection as well as the accompanying, negative emotions. The most successful salespeople will be able to manage their emotions effectively, a key component of emotional stability. Also, given that the sales profession involves a great deal of emotional labor (defined as the ability to manage emotions according to organizational expectations and rules, or "putting on an act to get the job done" (Hochschild, 1983), "emotional dissonance" can occur. Emotional dissonance is an inner conflict between real and required feelings, and can be a significant source of job stress (Morris & Feldman, 1997). Inasmuch as the ability to control negative emotions, manage feelings, and remain calm in a variety of interactions should serve salespeople well, especially in the face of failure, disappointment, stress or uncertainty, emotional resilience should play an important role in success and satisfaction. In addition, emotional stability or emotional resilience has also been found
to be positively related to career satisfaction in other studies, as well (Boudreau et al., 2001; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Williamson et al., 2005).

There were also significant, positive correlations between career satisfaction and the other Big Five traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness. These results can be interpreted in the context of characteristic job demands and personality, as well as intrinsic career success and its relationship to satisfaction. Intrinsic career success refers to the subjective evaluation of one’s career, usually measured in terms of job or career satisfaction (Judge, Heller & Mount, 2002). Considering satisfaction from an intrinsic success/subjective evaluation perspective, agreeableness has been found to be negatively related to sales performance and career satisfaction (Judge et al, 2002; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). Moreover, Furnham and Fudge (2008) suggested that salespeople high in agreeableness might be more concerned about the feelings or opinions of others, and therefore less able to overcome rejection by taking a failed sale personally, causing them to lose confidence in their ability. At face value, a negative correspondence between agreeableness and sales success makes sense given that the most effective sales people would be more interested in closing the sale than making friends with their co-workers, or being overly concerned with the opinions of their prospects or customers.

However, in the current study agreeableness was positively related to career satisfaction. Perhaps this is because agreeableness was operationalized in a teamwork context, as the “propensity for working as part of a team and functioning cooperatively on work group efforts.” A teamwork context implies a collaborative or interpersonal job
component, which is consistent with O*NET’s list of core sales activities. These core activities include communicating with people outside the organization, as well as supervisors and peers. In addition, the typical salesperson can be regarded as a communication "orchestrator," who must be able to ask for, receive and coordinate the assistance of coworkers in their efforts to provide information and service to their clients (Jones, Brown, Zoltners, & Weitz, 2005). Further, in the event that a company organizes sales positions by specialized areas, such as industry or activity (new customers versus account maintenance, for example), a team orientation might be a necessary trait, requiring that one works with or relies on others to get the job done (Weitz & Bradford, 1999). Higher scores on agreeableness-teamwork orientation might also correspond to those who hold sales positions with a strong social component, such as insurance or real estate sales, while lower scores on agreeableness-teamwork correspond to more independent sales roles, such as a telemarketer or manufacturer’s representative. Regardless of the specific occupational scenario, it appears likely that that working successfully with others, such as accountants, engineers or members of the marketing staff, may help some salespersons to succeed, and thereby experience greater satisfaction with their overall career.

Turning to the other Big Five traits, conscientiousness was found to be positively related to career satisfaction. One might conclude that conscientiousness would be a prominent trait among salespeople given the corresponding sales environment and its demand for organization, accuracy and details (of reports, proposals, transactions and
completed orders). In addition, O*NET lists “achievement, effort and dependability” as among the key work styles and values of salespeople which is consistent with the present study’s conceptualization of the conscientiousness construct.

In the findings of previous research, conscientiousness has been positively associated with career satisfaction (e.g. Judge & Higgins, 1999), and negatively associated in others (Boudreau et al., 2001). In attempting to parse out the role that conscientiousness plays in organizational behavior, researchers have recently investigated the relationship between conscientiousness and performance (Barrick, Mount & Piotrowski, 2002). Because conscientiousness includes two distinct but related dimensions, achievement striving (e.g. goal setting) and order (e.g. self discipline), it is possible that the global trait of conscientiousness may not sufficiently represent some important subfacets for a sales force population. Instead, the conscientiousness-performance linkage may vary depending on which narrow traits are being considered (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

In the current study, a moderator effect may be at play that more closely represents a salient dimension for salespeople than the global trait of conscientiousness. For example, some studies indicate that the subfactor of achievement, operationalized in terms of behaviors such as goal setting, is a better predictor of sales performance than conscientiousness (Barrick et al., 1993; Vinchur et al., 1998). Need for achievement, especially in the form of ambition, is widely considered to be an important sales trait (Soyer, Rovenpor, & Kopelman, 1999). To be successful in a sales career, it is helpful
for employees to be motivated by an inner drive to close the sale (Amyx & Alford, 2005). Given the relatively high correlations between career satisfaction and work drive in the present study, the need for achievement trait facet may help explain the conscientiousness-satisfaction relationship beyond the global trait of conscientiousness. Alternatively, it might be that people who are in sales find themselves attracted to the field in spite of the dutifulness or rule-conforming demands of the job (which are also facets of conscientiousness).

Finally, the Big Five trait of openness has not consistently been found to be related to career success. In some cases, positive correlations have been found (Lounsbury et al., 2003; Lounsbury et al., 2007); in others, negative correlations have been reported (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). In the current study, a positive correlation was found between career satisfaction and openness. Openness is conceptualized here as being receptive to change, new experiences, and learning. Along these lines, O*NET characterizes the sales job as requiring that one be open to change (positive or negative) and to variety in the workplace.” One interpretation of the positive correlation between openness and satisfaction in the present study is that professional development and training is an ongoing requirement for sales staff in most companies (Cron, Marshall, Singh, Spiro, & Sujan, 2005). Given that researchers predict an even greater influx of novice salespeople into the sales field in the future (Chang, 2003) the need for such training and development is likely to increase. Inasmuch as openness has been associated
with trainability and learning, especially in the sales domain (Salgado, 1997), it may be a useful, if not necessary attribute of successful salespeople.

The second research question examined the relationships between narrow traits and career satisfaction. Because all five narrow traits were investigated as directional hypotheses, and all findings were significant, the results for each trait will be discussed in detail, below.

The third hypothesis was supported in that assertiveness was positively related to career satisfaction. According to Holland, salespeople are Enterprising individuals and their corresponding work environments require initiative and persuasion (Holland et al., 1994). Initiative and persuasion are consonant with the present study’s conceptualization of assertiveness as “a person’s disposition to…seize the initiative, and exert influence in a forthright manner,” and are consistent with job demands such as approaching customers and completing sales transactions. As Rasmusson noted (1999), assertiveness is a key sales trait, needed for autonomous, “self starter” activities such as territory development, identifying prospects, pursuing sales goals, influencing decisions, and closing sales. Further, most sales roles require the incumbent to be persuasive and use interpersonal influence to be successful. Without assertiveness, it is hard to imagine that an individual could be successful in any sales environment because initiative, persuasion, and influence are almost always prerequisites for successful selling. Assertiveness has also been found to be related to career satisfaction in studies of various job groups (Lounsbury et al.,
2003; Lounsbury et al., 2007; Williamson et al., 2005), which points toward the fundamental importance of assertiveness in most occupations.

The fourth hypothesis was supported in that customer service orientation was positively associated with career satisfaction. In Holland’s terminology, social types and social environments are characterized by an emphasis on individuals who are people-oriented, socially responsive, and have the ability to negotiate, consult, and build relationships with others (Holland et al., 1994). Social characteristics would be particularly important for salespeople who have frequent interaction with customers and direct responsibility for customer satisfaction, such as those engaged in high volume retail settings. In fact, salespeople in boundary-spanning roles share qualities in common with those engaged in service work, such that many selection instruments used for customer service jobs are oftentimes very similar to those used for sales jobs (Frei & McDaniel, 1998). Moreover, Hogan, Hogan and Gregory (1992) reported that managing customer requests and complaints was one of the most fundamental aspects of the sales job. The present study conceptualized customer service orientation as the propensity to be highly responsive to customers and to go “above and beyond” one’s normal duties in order to satisfy a customer, activities which are consistent with a salesperson’s typical job demands, especially in competitive sales markets and in the context of relationship marketing (Weitz & Bradford, 1999). In addition, the trait of customer service orientation has been found to be predictive of job performance in a meta analysis of a variety of jobs including sales (Frei & McDaniel, 1998). Given the work-related nature of
the customer service orientation measure, one can interpret positive supervisory ratings as
contributing to an overall sense of career satisfaction through goal achievement, and with
various rewards associated with higher levels of work performance.

However, customer service orientation could be considered a negative aspect of
the sales job itself. The sales role is often a boundary-spanning position, where
salespersons have to please both their clients and the organization for which they work;
thus, conflict between quality of service and productivity can result (Zeithaml, Bitner, &
Gremler, 2006). A salesperson high in customer service orientation might feel the need
to attend to a customer’s demands to the point where the salesperson’s attention interferes
with their optimal sales output. Thus, while customer service orientation predicts career
satisfaction in this sample of sales professionals, the relationship might depend upon the
context of the job (whether the salesperson has a lot of interpersonal contact with clients),
and the potential conflict between the need to meet both customer demands and
organization-based expectations, such as sales quotas or cost per sale.

The fourth hypothesis was also supported, as optimism was positively and
significantly related to career satisfaction. As conceptualized in the current study,
optimists tend to have “an upbeat, hopeful outlook, concerning situations, people, and
prospects, even in the face of difficulty and adversity.” According to Holland codes,
Enterprising individuals are considered optimistic (Holland et al., 1994), an important
trait in the sales profession.
In his theory of learned optimism, Seligman (1991) used the term “explanatory style” to account for how some people persevere and others give up in the face of adversity. Applied to the sales profession, salespeople who are optimistic see failed sales calls as a challenge and an opportunity to hone their skills and abilities in order to “do better next time.” Seligman and Schulman (1986) found that optimism predicted sales productivity in insurance salesman. Similarly, studies by Schulman (1995), reported optimists outselling pessimists by 20-40 percent in a variety of industries.

Because sales jobs are inherently characterized by rejection, and a salesperson has more failures than successes, an optimistic outlook is likely to be of greater importance to a salesperson than to someone in another profession (Vinchr et al., 1998). Studies of specific characteristics of effective salespeople limns the importance of keeping a positive attitude, especially when persevering in the face of repeated sales rejections (Cort & Shanklin, 1998; McMurry, 1961). Therefore, when performing difficult sales functions such as prospecting new territory, cold calling customers, and bouncing back from sales rejections, optimism can serve an invaluable function for salespeople and be a important trait in relation to career satisfaction.

Work Drive was also found to be related to career satisfaction for this sample of sales professionals, supporting the sixth hypothesis. This result is consistent with other studies that found significant, positive associations between work drive and career satisfaction in various occupations (Lounsbury et al., 2007; Lounsbury et al., 2008; Williamson et al., 2005). Further, while Enterprising people and environments are
associated with ambition, Conventional types are characterized as persistent (Holland et al., 1994). Both of these descriptors, ambition and persistence, correspond to the narrow trait of work drive. Since work drive is conceptualized in this study as the disposition to spend considerable time and effort on work-related tasks, increased levels of career satisfaction might stem from the positive effects of continued hard work and expenditure of effort on work goal attainment (e.g. Adams, King, & King, 1996).

Finally, contrary to the seventh hypothesis, image management was found to be negatively correlated to career satisfaction. As defined in the present study, image management reflects a person’s disposition to monitor, observe, regulate, and control the self-presentation and image s/he projects during interactions with other people” at work. For sales representatives, image management is important for projecting a professional demeanor and presenting a positive image of the product and the company they represent. Salespersons continually monitor their image through all phases of the selling process, from their initial meeting with a prospect to the closing and delivery of the product or service. Researchers have found that the related concept of self monitoring is a trait associated with success in sales and marketing jobs (Day & Kilduff, 2003), especially in adaptive selling contexts where the salesperson must use environmental (customer) cues to adapt and modify their own behaviors in order to maintain an appropriate image and meet customer needs (Widmier, 2002).

However, in the current study, there was an inverse relationship with image management and career satisfaction for sales professionals. Perhaps those who scored
high in image management had lower scores on satisfaction because the effort involved in monitoring and modifying behaviors in response to others’ expectations can be difficult to maintain. The sales process requires the strategic management of emotions in order to achieve sales goals, and high amounts of emotional management (emotional labor) are needed in order to sustain behaviors such as friendliness, sincerity, confidence and enthusiasm. Jobs that require high levels of emotional labor have been shown to increase stress (Wharton, 1996), and lower satisfaction (Pugliesi, 1999). Further, in the event that the salesperson perceives a need to engage in behaviors that do not correspond to their true feelings or sense of identity in order to facilitate a sale, such as pretending to agree with a customer’s opinion or laughing at a customer’s joke that they don’t find funny, the result might be a loss of authenticity. Given that authenticity has been positively linked to career commitment and job performance of salespeople (Schaefer & Pettijohn, 2006), the inverse relationship between image management and satisfaction in the current study might be related to lack of genuineness felt by the respondents in dealing with their customers; thus, if they felt that were not expressing their “authentic self” in their self presentation behaviors, they might feel less satisfaction with their career as a whole.

A similar explanation involves the concept of social desirability, a construct related to image management and defined as one’s conscious desire to project a positive image in the presence of others. In a sample of real estate salespeople, Crosby (1990) found a negative relationship between social desirability and sales success, contending
that an effective salesperson needs the ability to handle rejection and can best do so by not needing to seek approval from others. According to Crosby (Ibid), the need to seek approval and project a positive image results in a lack of self-confidence, and inhibits the ability to rebound from failed sales efforts. Perhaps the lower the image management score, the more satisfaction and success the salesperson will experience because they can direct their energy into resilience-enhancing rather than self-defeating behaviors.

Further, Barrick, Parks and Mount (2005) found that people who worked in jobs with a high interpersonal component (business-related fields) and who also scored high on measures of emotional stability, extraversion, or openness to experience but low on measures of self-monitoring, achieved the highest levels of performance as measured by ability to communicate, listen, build rapport, etc. Thus, the self-monitoring and extraversion traits played compensatory roles. If one was high on one trait, he or she could be low on the other, and vice versa, while still achieving the same outcomes. This is an interesting finding given the results of the present study, in that the respondents were relatively high in the trait of extraversion. Perhaps the subsequent low scores on image management reported in the current study were due to inherently high levels of sociability, measured by the broad trait of extraversion. Thus, those low on image management have less need to rely on self-monitoring behaviors to be successful, communicate effectively and build rapport (Barrick & Mount, 2005).

It is also worth noting that emotional stability, optimism and work drive represented the highest-magnitude correlations with career satisfaction for the present
sample of sales professionals. These three traits correspond with job demands typically found in the sales field and represent some of the most relevant success-oriented behaviors. In the O*NET taxonomy (www.onetcenter.org), two of the core competencies (the knowledge, skills, abilities and work styles needed to succeed) of salespeople are adjustment (dealing with stress and maintaining composure), and achievement orientation (persevering in the face of obstacles, and demonstrating a willingness to take on challenges and being motivated to succeed), which align well with emotional stability, optimism and work drive, respectively. Insofar as job competencies lead to performance and performance leads to satisfaction (Judge, Thoresen, Bono & Patton, 2001), these traits also support the PE fit-satisfaction paradigm. In addition, the current study's results are consistent with the findings of Lounsbury, Loveland, Sundstrom, Gibson (2003), who investigated the relationship between personality traits and career satisfaction across 14 occupations and found that these same three traits accounted for most of the explained variance of career satisfaction in their sample of almost 6000 subjects. Lounsbury and colleagues findings (2003) have been replicated (Williamson et al., 2005) and suggest the importance of a constellation of “Big Three” in relation to general career satisfaction that generalize across occupations, perhaps similar to a “g” factor of intelligence (Spearman, 1927).

Finally, the third research question explored a personality-satisfaction profile for this sample of sales professionals. Based on Holland’s vocational theory of
P-E fit, the current study proposed that higher trait scores would result in higher career satisfaction ratings. In addition, sales persons with a greater number of high scores on sales-oriented personality traits had higher career satisfaction scores. As anticipated, there appears to be a positive, linear relationship between trait score profile and satisfaction scores; as the number of traits increases, satisfaction increases, indicating that may be a common sales profile for career satisfaction. Salespeople who score higher on traits that are positively related to career satisfaction in the present study (higher extraversion, higher assertiveness, higher work drive, higher optimism, etc.) appear to be more likely to experience career satisfaction. Such information could be useful in occupational summaries such as O‘NET and other career planning devices which describe key traits for sales and other occupations.
CHAPTER IV
GENERAL SUMMARY

Future Directions

The present study set out to identify which characteristics are associated with salesperson satisfaction and found both broad and narrow personality traits which are related to levels of career satisfaction. On the basis of the present findings, several suggestions for future research directions are made.

To begin with, contemporary scholars suggest that the nature of the sales position appears to be changing, owing in large part to the adaptive or relationship-oriented nature of the selling process (Cron et al., 2005). For instance, adaptive selling requires a salesperson to have collaborative and problem-solving skills to provide custom-based solutions in a timely manner (Jones et al., 2005). Identifying core personality traits, which also tap into the most critical KSA’s for sales employees, could help predict important sales role outcomes, including career satisfaction, success, retention, and longevity.

Another potentially useful typology centers on the idea of job context. Barrick, Parks and Mount (2005) use the term “contingent predictors” to indicate the relevance of certain traits depending on the context, situations and demands of the job. Literature focusing on the role of personality in the workplace has repeatedly cited agreeableness as a negative predictor and extraversion as a positive predictor of performance. However, agreeableness has been found to correlate positively with performance when the job depends on getting along with others, as with relationship-oriented selling. In contrast,
extraversion was relevant in the context of negotiating or persuasion, reflecting, perhaps a more traditional, “old school” approach to sales (Hogan & Holland, 2003). In another study, emotional stability was found to be positively associated with the ability to meet the demands of critical buyers in maintaining long-term selling relationships (Teng, Huang, & Tsai, 2007). Based on the research cited above, the most effective salesperson engaged in relationship marketing is likely to have higher levels of agreeableness, emotional stability and extraversion. The creation of a unified sales typology that identifies both broad and narrow traits best suited for relationship marketing or other specific sales job contexts would be a useful tool for sales managers, human resource professionals, career counselors and others concerned with this emerging form of selling.

The current study explored an initial trait profile for satisfaction, which should be verified and extended by future investigators.

Another direction for future research involves developing narrow-trait measures that tap into characteristics most relevant for sales-related behaviors to predict outcomes such as satisfaction. The present study employed work-based narrow traits, but did not discriminate between types of sales positions or sales activities, which could provide context-dependent variation (Paunonen, Rothstein, & Jackson, 1999). For example, the KSA’s and personality traits required for a real estate agent are very different than those required for a retail clerk in a clothing store, even though these occupations might share similar, global characteristics such as interpersonal communication skills. Looking at the narrow traits that characterize openness, such as sentience versus innovation, or those that
describe conscientiousness, such as order versus achievement might become more predictive and useful when matched against specific sales activities.

In addition, although correlational in nature, this study provided some degree of replication of studies conducted by Lounsbury and his colleagues (2007; 2008) suggesting a “Big Three” core group of career satisfaction traits, emotional stability, optimism and work drive. It would be useful and interesting to see whether these results generalize to other occupations, or whether a “Big Three” trait structure holds in future studies sampling diverse demographic and cultural characteristics, or management and leadership styles.

Furthermore, one could study narrow and broad personality traits in the context of a broader range of dependent variables related to work outcomes, such as life satisfaction, job withdrawal, career advancement, job satisfaction, career salience, and extrinsic career success; or investigate additional variables that provide explanations of career satisfaction beyond antecedent personality traits, such as job autonomy, salary, advancement opportunities, or organizational support. Future research might also include additional narrow personality traits that might explain variance in career satisfaction beyond those addressed in the current study, such as empathy, self efficacy or attribution style, especially when considering context-specific differences in sales jobs.

Finally, future research could use a longitudinal study that allows inferences of causality. For example, does optimism cause career satisfaction, or does career
satisfaction cause optimism? Additional research is needed to identify the antecedents and consequences of sales outcomes.

Limitations

There are several limitations one should consider when interpreting results of this data. Firstly, the sample was self-selected in that they voluntarily sought out and completed the questionnaires in the process of seeking career transition information from the eCareer fit website. As a result, one could assume some restriction of range, especially with regards to career satisfaction measures; the potential effect of such range restriction would be attenuation of correlation magnitudes. Another characteristic problem of self-report personality measures is self-report and image management bias (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Paulhus, 1991; Schmitt, 1994). However, because the participants in the present study personally elected to take the inventory for the purpose of self learning and career planning, they may not have been trying to enhance their responses to items in the personality measures, especially since that could have skewed their results and defeated the original purpose of taking the measures—to learn more about themselves as well as best-fit and worst-fit career paths (Lounsbury & Gibson, 2006). A final reason why self-report bias may not have been a problem in the present context is that many studies have found no negative effect on outcome-related validity of self report measures (Barrick & Mount, 1996).

Secondly, the study used an archival dataset, which did not include characteristics such as tenure or career stage, variables which might have an impact on career
satisfaction. In addition, while there are numerous advantages to the use of archival data, such as being more convenient, less expensive, and capable of exploring numerous associations of interest, there are drawbacks as well. For example, archival datasets are prone to missing data, and internal and external validity issues such as lack of control over data collection methods, and questions of generalizability due to the fact that the archival sample may not adequately represent the population under study.

Further, the current study employed a cross-sectional design. However, for the purpose of measuring satisfaction, particularly when assessing variables that take into account behaviors across time (career span, for example) versus in-the-moment events (current job), longitudinal data would give a more complete picture of the relationship between traits and satisfaction. For example, how might the trait-satisfaction relationship differ depending on stage-of-life cycles, where an individual might be entering the job market straight out of college, versus mid-career, or nearing retirement?

Lastly, the study investigated a broad range of sales job groups, rather than specific job titles or roles. Given the wide variety of sales positions and associated duties (the difference between telemarketer, insurance salesman, retail clerk, etc), especially with regards to the utility of narrow and broad traits as discussed above, such aggregation necessarily limits the ability to draw inferences regarding different types of sales positions and common sales groups.
Conclusion

In summary, the current study demonstrated multiple linkages between personality traits and career satisfaction of sales professionals, adding to the growing body of research on the relationship between broad and narrow personality traits and satisfaction, and providing support for Holland’s model and for the existence of a “Big Three” career satisfaction profile. Taken as a whole, the present study affirms the importance of personality constructs in research on career satisfaction for a specific occupation viewed in the aggregate, while also indicating the need for more fine-grained investigations which would enhance our understanding of the viability of the present findings for more specific, diverse sales occupations.
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