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**Salesperson's Spirituality:
Impact on Customer Orientation and Adaptability**

Abstract

Purpose - This paper uses the perspective of ego to investigate the spirituality of a salesperson and its influence on customer orientation and adaptive selling behavior. Meaningful work is proposed as a mediator.

Design/methodology/approach - Cross-sectional data was collected from 218 insurance salespeople in India. Bootstrap with SEM was used to test mediation.

Findings - The paper finds that there is full-mediation through meaningful work on both the outcome behaviors.

Research limitations/implications - The findings will encourage researchers to link various salesperson outcomes such as ethical sales behavior, salesperson service behavior, and so on to spirituality.

Practical Implications - The findings can provide some relevant inputs for sales leadership actions aimed at facilitating employees' spiritual experiences.

Originality/value - This is among the first few studies, as what we believe, in sales literature to find out that spirituality and sales job not only can co-exist, but they do complement each other.

Keywords – Adaptive Selling; Customer Orientation; Meaningful Work; Spirituality; Quiet Ego

Article Classification – Research paper

Introduction

Sales jobs are becoming increasingly challenging, particularly due to a decline in traditional forms of communities and working culture (Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram, 2008). In light of this, salespeople are increasingly looking for spirituality (Cohen, 1997) as it expands the frontiers of consciousness beyond the organizational sphere (Corner, 2011) aiding intuition, creativity (Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002), and overall performance (Fry *et al.*, 2011). Spirituality enables sales executives to treat others with respect and thus builds trust, which is a key component in managing relationships (Cohen, 1997). A highly spiritual salesperson can let go of their ego (Neal, 2000), leading to better buyer–seller interactions (Pandey *et al.*, 2009). Highly spiritual salespeople question why they should sell rather than how they should sell (Willingham, 2006), thereby aligning themselves with a higher purpose at work (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000). Overall, highly spiritual sales professionals could be customer centric, adaptive to the sales context, and more likely to generate higher profits, while exhibiting enhanced productivity and less deviant behavior (Aravamudhan, 2007; Chawla, 2013; Fry *et al.*, 2010). By facilitating spirituality, organizations can build characteristics that lead to success in sales professionals, such as trust, benevolence, righteousness, and loyalty (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004).

In spite of the overwhelming evidence of the benefits of spirituality, very little progress has been made in the specific context of the sales profession. This paper attempts to fill this gap by examining the influence of spirituality on salespeople’s customer orientation and adaptive selling behavior. We examine this relationship using meaningful work as the mediating variable.

Spirituality

Spirituality has been understood in a number of ways. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) conceptualized it as inner power; Harlos (2000) as transcendence towards ultimate values; Konz and Ryans (1999) as one's relationship with transcendent and connectedness with others; Mitroff and Denton (1999) as connectedness to one's complete self, others and the entire universe; and Vaill (1998) as an existential search. Hill *et al.* (2000) considered spirituality as feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from the search for the sacred; Zinnbauer *et al.* (1999) described it as a search for the sacred; and Underwood (2006) as one's union to the divine, connectedness, compassion, mercy, and gratitude.

In this study, we adopted Piedmont's conceptualization of spirituality as coming from a self-interest transcendent perspective; that is, "the capacity to look life from a transcendent perspective in which a person sees a fundamental unity among the diverse strivings of nature and finds a bonding with others that cannot be severed, not even by death" (Piedmont, 1999, p. 988). This conceptualization has merits, as it is non-religious and hence widely applicable (e.g. Burris *et al.*, 2011; Diessner *et al.*, 2008; Piedmont, 2007; Piedmont and Leach, 2000 etc.). It was also noted as among the two best conceptualizations of spirituality in a critical review of 24 definitions of spirituality conducted by Kapuscinski and Masters (2010). Piedmont's definition of spirituality has three dimensions: prayer fulfillment, which is "the feeling of joy and contentment from one's prayers and/or meditations"; universality, which comprises "a belief in the unity and purpose of life"; and connectedness, which is "a belief that one is part of a larger human orchestra whose contribution is indispensable in creating life's continuing harmony" (Piedmont, 1999, p. 988).

Theory of Self-Interest Transcendence

Long back Fiske (1992) stated the ailing problem of the fields of psychology and social science is the foundational assumption that individuals are self-interest seeking at the expense of others. The assumption that an individual is self-interest seeking can be inferred from several theories like agency theory, transaction cost theory, motivational theories, utility maximization theory, morality and ethics, and psychoanalytic theory and so on. However, Seligman (1999) rejected this negative assumption of human motivation. He laid foundations to positive psychology domain that assumes that individual is socially and morally motivated and would like to shed ego.

In the similar lines to Seligman's proposal, Bauer and Wayment (2008), call for moving away from individual notions of self versus others through their self-interest transcendence theory. This mid-range theory explains how individual transcends from noisy ego to quiet ego. Ego indicates the structure or organization of one's concept of self and others (Wayment *et al.*, 2015). Ego could be about situations, in persons and in the development of person over time. Through their theory, Bauer and Wayment (2008) suggest that there are two paths to transcendence; (a) balancing the needs of self and others in everyday life; and (b) develop compassion, non-defensive self-awareness and interdependent self-identity.

As per the Self-Interest Transcendence theory, two kinds of egos exist: noisy and quiet (Bauer and Wayment, 2008; Shaver, 2010; Wayment *et al.*, 2015). When the noisy ego is prominent in individuals, they are defensive, and concerned about their status, approval from others, and appearances. When the quiet ego is high, they are more concerned with the underlying meaning and process of the job undertaken. The noisy ego processes information that blinds people to their shortcomings and undermines their relationship with others (Leary, 2004). Thus, even at the expense of others, it forms the primary source of personal distress and

interpersonal strife (Waldron, 2003). On the other hand, the quiet ego helps individuals to be open to others' point of view and is more inward looking, and thus broadens the self-other vision. The quiet ego is less negatively influenced by the self as it seeks to create a sense of unity and purpose in the life (Leary, 2004). After a certain point, increased self-interest can be detrimental to the self and to others. Hence, the individual will transcend from having a noisy to a quiet ego. This transcendence is facilitated by spirituality (Ardelt, 2008).

In general, a salesperson's ability to understand customer requirements and balance this with their own requirements determines their customer orientation and adaptability. In turn, these aspects significantly influence performance. Salespeople who comprehend and exhibit high levels of human understanding ideally possess a quiet ego, while those who lack such empathy may possess a noisier ego. In fact, in the personal interest, salespeople may exhibit altruistic behavior (Etzioni, 1988, Jensen, 1994, Sen, 2002) thus transcending from noisy ego to quiet ego. Compassion towards others helps shape self-identity and wellbeing (Gilbert, 2009), while transcendence helps individuals to avoid a static existence (Kosloff *et al.*, 2008) and develop humility (Powers *et al.*, 2007). It also enhances mental health (Mackenzie *et al.*, 2000), commitment to serve, and commitment to give and pursue ethical conduct (Ardelt, 2008), thus advancing personal growth, and the desire to contribute to something larger than oneself (Hawley, 1993) and pursue job satisfaction (Komala and Ganesh, 2007).

Customer Orientation

Customer orientation entails the application of marketing concept by the sales professionals at the customer level and is understood as a set of behaviors that helps customers to make purchase decisions that best satisfy their needs (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Customer-oriented sales professionals act as consultants, advocates, and friends while helping in customer decision

making. They focus on the long-term satisfaction of the customer and not the immediate impact of the sale itself (Kelley, 1992). Such sales professionals are intrinsically motivated to contribute to their own wellbeing, and the wellbeing of others and of organizations (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000); listens to customers; and engage in dialogue that is fruitful for both parties (Thakor and Joshi, 2005). Customer orientation thus leads to better long-term performance (Jaramillo and Grisaffe, 2009), better customer perception about the salesperson, and customer trust and satisfaction (Stock and Hoyer, 2005).

Salespeople with a high customer orientation have been found to have higher concern for the others, as well as for themselves, while those with low customer orientation lack concern for others but have high concern for themselves (Blake and Mouton, 1970; Buzzotta *et al.*, 1972; Saxe and Weitz, 1982; Thomas, 1976). The above mentioned transcendence of ego involves a concern for solving customers' problems by sacrificing self - interests (Bodkin, 1989; Bodkin and Stevenson, 1993). In addition, highly customer-oriented sales professionals not only discuss product benefits, but also limitations (Schwepker, 2003), thereby reflecting their self-interest transcendence. As per Williams (1998), a highly customer-oriented sales professional will mostly exhibit coordinative negotiation behaviors, while one with low customer orientation may exhibit command and competitive behaviors. Sales professionals that exhibit coordinative behaviors will experience transcendence and look for mutual obligations and gains, rather than just personal gains. Thus, customer orientation involves self-interest transcendence and mutually beneficial behaviors, in which spirituality plays a role.

H₁: There is a positive relationship between spirituality and customer orientation

Adaptive Selling Behavior

Adaptive selling behavior involves altering behaviors during customer interactions based on the perceived information about the nature of the selling situation to ensure meaningful dialogue with customers (Spiro and Weitz, 1990). Such adaptation enables sales professionals to assess customer problems and offer solutions, while ensuring that customers can freely express any issues (Jaramillo and Grisaffe, 2009).

Extrinsically motivated sales professionals focus their attention on the outcomes of their work (Weitz *et al.*, 1986), and thus achieve success through tried and tested methods, rather than innovative approaches, in their ever-changing sales environment. This implies that adaptive selling behavior is independent of the influence of economic or narrow self-interests. Thus, adaptive selling behavior can result from the empathetic concern and altruistic motivation of the sales professional towards the customer (Kim, 2010), indicating transcendence from noisy to quiet ego.

Evidence exists in the literature about the positive associations of adaptive selling with perspective-taking (Spiro and Weitz, 1990), which is defined as the ability to put oneself in others' shoes to understand their situation (Davis, 1983). Thus, it can be said that adaptive salespeople have a quiet enough ego to hear others' concerns. There is also evidence in the literature of positive associations between adaptive selling and empathetic concern (Spiro and Weitz, 1990), which is understood as the ability to feel the emotions of others. Thus, adaptive salespeople are receptive to customers' internal rhythms, and hence, have a relatively quieter ego.

H₂: There is a positive relationship between spirituality and adaptive selling behavior

Spirituality and Meaningful work

Meaningful work implies that the work is significant in the eyes of the employee (Rosso *et al.*, 2010), thus varies from one person to another because of individual idiosyncratic interpretations, and evaluation of the task at hand and its relevance to the self and others (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 2003). Meaningful work entails seeking value in what one does by aligning it with a higher purpose (Duchon and Plowman, 2005; Overell, 2008) that is worthwhile in the larger scheme of things (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000). Meaningful work creates a sense of joy (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 2003) that enlivens the self via the full use of one's talents and potential (Fry, 2003). It connects workers to a larger good and to things viewed by the worker as important in life (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003).

Individuals often turn to spirituality in their search for meaning and purpose in life (Frankl, 2008), and think of their work in spiritual terms (Sullivan, 2006). Spirituality induces self-interest transcendence (Chawla, 2013; Maslow, 1971; Pawar, 2009), thus moving a person closer to quieter ego, which is more balanced and open to others as compared to noisier ego (Ardelt, 2008). This quiet ego expresses itself as the commitment to serve others, giving meaning to the individual (Ardelt, 2008). In salespeople, it may express as the commitment to serve the customers, as this is the greater purpose (or meaning) at work for most salespeople (Willingham, 2006). Since meaningful work emphasizes the need to serve customers, it may ultimately result in customer-oriented behaviors that help best solve customer problems to achieve customer satisfaction. This argument is supported by expectancy theory which states that more the commitment (valence) to an anticipated outcome (serving customers), more is the internal motivation to expend efforts to achieve that outcome (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990).

Thus, we propose the following:

H₃: Meaningful work mediates the relationship between the spirituality and customer orientation of a salesperson

The sense of joy that is derived from meaningful work (Wrzensniewski *et al.*, 2003) connects sales professionals to a larger good and to the aspects that are important to their work life (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). Meaningfulness in work may motivate the salesforce by tapping into and unleashing the human spirit to earn respect and demonstrate value to others (Fineman, 1983). Adaptive selling requires such spirit to alter the behaviors in customer-interaction or selling situations (Spiro and Weitz, 1990). Making work meaningful for a salesforce builds their altruistic motives, which can in turn result in adaptive selling behavior (Giacobbe *et al.*, 2006). Meaningful work for sales force is focused on the motive of making difference in the lives of customers. Since enhancing customer lives requires an understanding of each customer's unique viewpoint, needs, and situations, salespeople should possess good 'perspective-taking' skills and 'empathy', both of which involve transcendence of self-interest and adaptation of sales behaviors (Spiro and Weitz, 1990). Hence, meaningful work will lead a salesforce to practice adaptive selling behaviors.

H₄: Meaningful work mediates the relationship between spirituality and adaptive selling behavior

Method

Initially, an exploratory study was conducted on sales professionals to understand whether and how spirituality plays a role to influence sales professional's behaviors. Semi-structured personal interviews with eight experienced sales professionals (average experience of 12 years) was conducted for about 15 minutes each. We could deduce from the content analysis

of the interviews that spirituality induces commitment to contribute to customers (i.e. develop meaning in work), that further drives sales professional's actions in customer orientation and adaptive selling. Later we scaled up and conducted a cross sectional survey on insurance front line sales managers drawn from 10 different companies and having their offices in Chandigarh, Mohali, Panchkula and Ambala regions of Northern India.

Existing scales were identified from the literature and were subjected to a qualitative assessment by six professors working in the area of marketing and eight sales professionals. Refined items were then subjected to a pre-test on 35 front-line sales managers. Results were examined using the descriptive statistics (skewness and kurtosis), and item-to-total correlation as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2010). Items with weak item-to-total correlation were eliminated or modified prior to final data collection. The constructs in the final survey were measured using a mix of 7-point and 5-point Likert like scales in order to reduce the possibility of common method bias.

We adopted the nine item short version of the spiritual transcendence five point scale developed by Piedmont (1999) which was also endorsed by Kapuscinski and Masters (2010) as the best available spiritual measures. The scale has three dimensions: prayer fulfillment, universality and connectedness. During the face validity we added one item as suggested by the reviewers. However, pretesting on sales executives resulted in removing three items. Two items from the prayer fulfillment dimension: 'Prayers or meditations make me stronger internally' and 'Prayers or meditations give me inner peace', were eliminated because their skewness and kurtosis values were outside the suggested range of $-1 < x_i < +1$ and $-1.5 < y_i < +1.5$ respectively, where x_i and y_i are the skewness and kurtosis values of the i^{th} item (Hair et al., 2010). One item from the universality dimension: 'I feel affection with all of humanity' did not fulfill the criteria

for the minimum item-to-total correlation value of .4, and was therefore eliminated. We used the eight item five point meaningful work scale from Willingham (2006) and added one item each representing alignment and joy. Out of the ten items, one item: 'I have a clear life purpose' was removed because of the poor skewness and kurtosis values and two items: 'Fear of failure and/or rejection restricts my ability to sell' and 'I welcome problems and challenges (in selling) as a way to grow and become more successful' had poor item to total correlation values and were, therefore, eliminated. Out of the twelve item seven point scale customer orientation scale (Saxe and Weitz, 1982), pretesting results suggested us to remove four items. The item: 'A good salesperson has to have the customer's best interest in mind', had low item-to-total correlation value of .32, which is below the minimum suggested value of .4 (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, it was eliminated. Other three eliminated items were: 'I try to find out what kind of products/services will be most helpful to a customer', 'I try to solve a customer's problem with the products/services I sell' and 'I try to figure out what a customer's needs are'. These three items were having skewness and kurtosis values outside the suggested range of $-1 < x_i < +1$ and $-1.5 < y_i < +1.5$ respectively, where x_i and y_i are the skewness and kurtosis values of the i^{th} item (Hair et al., 2010). Finally, one item: 'I treat each customer differently from the other', was removed from the seven item seven point adaptive selling behavior scale by Spiro and Weitz (1990). The item was eliminated because it exceeded the suggested limit for skewness value.

Of the 218 respondents only two percent were under graduates, about 17 percent were female and nearly 30 percent were not married. Nearly 65 percent of the respondents had five or more years of experience. Out of the 218 responses, two were not useful due to serious incompleteness. Non response to about two items was observed from twenty one respondents. Missing values were computed using individual mean method as suggested by Shrive *et al.*

(2006). Resultant 216 responses were subjected to common method bias as recommended by Podsakoff and Organ (1986). Results from a principal components factor analysis showed that there were eight factors with 63.97 percent of total variance explained and with an Eigen value greater than 1. The first factor accounted for 22.03% of the total variance explained, thus proving no existence of common methods bias in the data. This study further applied marker variable technique given by Lindell and Whitney (2001) to assess the common method bias. This technique can be implemented both in a priori and post-hoc fashion. We used post-hoc guidelines from Lindell and Whitney (2001), Malhotra *et al.* (2006), and Richardson *et al.* (2009) to apply the technique on the data. We selected a post-hoc marker which is theoretically unrelated to at least one substantive variable. In post-hoc fashion, the best estimate of common method variance (CMV) in a data set is represented by the second-smallest positive correlation between a substantive variable and the post-hoc selected marker variable (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). Correlations between salespersons' propensity to leave the organization, the single-item post-hoc marker in this study (mean = 3.78, s.d. = 2.18), and other key variables were uniformly low. In this study, the second-smallest positive correlation, r_{M2} , was .10 (non-significant). For factor correlation calculation, according to Malhotra *et al.* (2006), the uncorrected estimate $r_{U(\text{Spirituality, Meaning})} = .29$, the CMV adjusted correlation $r_{A(\text{Spirituality, Meaning})} = .21$ with $t = 2.94$, similarly $r_{U(\text{Spirituality, CO})} = .17$, $r_{A(\text{Spirituality, CO})} = .07$ with $t = 1.00$, $r_{U(\text{Spirituality, ADAPT})} = .24$, $r_{A(\text{Spirituality, ADAPT})} = .15$ with $t = 2.13$, $r_{U(\text{Meaning, CO})} = .46$, $r_{A(\text{Meaning, CO})} = .40$ with $t = 6.35$, $r_{U(\text{Meaning, ADAPT})} = .27$, $r_{A(\text{Meaning, ADAPT})} = .18$ with $t = 2.59$, $r_{U(\text{CO, ADAPT})} = .38$, $r_{A(\text{CO, ADAPT})} = .31$ with $t = 4.97$. These results show that all CMV-adjusted correlations except between spirituality and customer orientation remain significant (at 95% significance level, two-tailed), therefore the common method bias is not found to be a concern in this study. The responses were

also examined for social desirability bias using a slightly modified version of Goldsmith and Hofacker (1991) ten-item short form of the original social desirability scale. Sixteen more responses were eliminated and the final data set consisted of 200 sample points.

Results

Model Validation

The CFA measurement model with 28 items and 4 constructs initially showed a poor fit: ($X^2 = 596.80$, $df = 341$, $P = .00$); normed chi-square ($CMIN/DF$) = 1.75; root mean square error of approximation ($RMSEA$) = .06; comparative fit index (CFI) = .85; Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .84. The model was then modified based on indicators such as standardized residual covariance matrix scores suggested by Hair et al. (2010), standardized regression weights (r), and squared multiple correlations (R^2) as well as theoretical justification. The items were eliminated from the initial measurement model in a series of steps to improve the model fit. From the six item scale of adaptive selling behavior, two items were removed. One item: 'I do not use a fixed sales technique' had low value of squared multiple correlation (.18), and the other: 'I change my technique from one customer to another' had high values of standardized residual covariances. From the spirituality scale, one item: 'I am concerned about those who will come after me in life' from the connectedness dimension was eliminated due to low squared multiple correlation and high value of standardized residual covariance. Two items: 'I am excited about what my product or service does for people' and 'My purpose in selling is to make life better for customers' were removed from the meaningful work scale. Both the items had higher values of standardized residual covariances. Additionally, the elimination of both these items did not affect the content validity of scale. From the customer orientation scale, one item: 'I try to help customers achieve their goals' was eliminated due to high values of standardized residual covariance. Overall,

21.43% of the total items were eliminated which was close to the thumb rule limit of 20% recommended by Hair *et al.* (2010).

The final confirmatory model one comprised of 22 items and 4 constructs. The chi-square was significant ($X^2 = 260.73$, $df = 200$, $P = .00$), however the other measures of fit [normed chi-square (CMIN/DF) = 1.304; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .04; comparative fit index (CFI) = .95; Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .94] show evidence of very good fit of the model to the data. The loadings of all of the items on the constructs were statistically significant at $P < .001$ (two tailed). The results of the confirmatory analysis and factor loadings for individual items are presented in Appendix A. Scale descriptives and correlations are presented in Table 1.

Place Table 1 about here

Reliability and Validity

Composite reliabilities for all the constructs were observed to be above .7 indicating good reliability. Our analysis showed that all items had loading estimates greater than .5 indicating convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2010). In the confirmatory analysis, the average variance extracted by each construct from its indicators was found to be greater than shared variance with every other construct as shown in Table 1. Thus, the constructs demonstrated good discriminant validity. For the construct of spirituality and adaptive selling behavior, AVE values are good. Since meaningful work is a relatively new construct, its AVE value of .38 is satisfactory, however AVE value is slightly low for customer orientation. Since the constructs of meaningful work and customer orientation do not produce any discriminant validity problems in the study, they are acceptable (Ping, 2009).

Hypothesis Testing

We tested for mediation using AMOS bootstrap procedure. As recommended by Hayes (2013) and Preacher and Hayes (2008) we have used the Bias Corrected confidence interval at 95% and 5000 bootstrap samples. Results indicate that Chi-square was significant at $P < .001$. The other measures of fit [normed Chi-square (CMIN/DF) = 1.36; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .04; comparative fit index (CFI) = .94; tucker-lewis index (TLI) = .93] showed evidence of a good fit of the model to the data. The model with standardized regression weights from the bootstrapping procedure is shown in Figure 1.

 Place Figure 1 about here

Results showed that direct effects of spirituality with both customer orientation and adaptive selling behavior were not supported. The standardized direct effect between spirituality and customer orientation was insignificant: $\beta = -.06$, BC 95% CI (-.65, .52), $p = .88$. The standardized direct effect between spirituality and adaptive selling behavior was insignificant: $\beta = .00$, BC 95% CI (-.69, .51), $p = .92$. Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 were not supported. However, it may mean that the effect of spirituality is fully mediated through meaningful work. We, therefore, examined the model estimates for indirect effect of spirituality. The AMOS bootstrap procedure revealed a significant standardized indirect effect between spirituality and customer orientation, with meaningful work as mediator: $\beta = .28$, BC 95% CI (.11, 2.16), $p = .01$. Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported for full mediation. The AMOS bootstrap procedure also revealed a significant standardized indirect effect between spirituality and adaptive selling

behavior, with meaningful work as mediator: $\beta = .23$, BC 95% CI (.07, 1.91), $p = .02$. Thus, hypothesis 4 was supported for full mediation. Results are summarized in Table 2.

 Place Table 2 about here

We re-verified for full mediation by first running SEM (this time without bootstrap) for the conceptual model without the mediator meaningful work. Here, we obtained positive significant relationships of spirituality with both customer orientation and adaptive selling. Next, we ran the model with meaningful work as mediator. We did not find any evidence of relationships of spirituality with both sales variables, but we found positive significant effects between spirituality and meaningful work, meaningful work and customer orientation, and meaningful work and adaptive selling. Thus, the results indicate that meaningful work fully mediates the relationship of spirituality with both customer-centric behaviors.

To further confirm the mediation effect, we followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) guidelines. Specifically, the following three regression equations should be estimated in order to test mediation: first, regressing the mediator on the independent variable; second, regressing the dependent variable on the independent variable; and third, regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator. The following conditions must hold for three equations to establish full mediation: first, the independent variable must affect the mediator in the first equation; second, the independent variable must affect the dependent variable in the second equation; and third, only the mediator must affect the dependent variable in the third equation. This study also examined the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) to confirm if the mediation paths were significant. Table 3 summarizes the results of mediation tests.

 Place Table 3 about here

The three equations of Model 1 tested the mediation effect of meaningful work on customer orientation. Models 1-1 and 1-2 confirmed that spirituality significantly affects meaningful work and customer orientation. For the full mediation effect of meaningful work to hold, the effect of spirituality on customer orientation must be insignificant when meaningful work is controlled, while the effect of meaningful work on customer orientation must be significant. As shown in Model 1-3 in Table 3, the effect of spirituality on customer orientation is insignificant, and the effect of meaningful work on customer orientation is significant. Thus, full mediation was supported. Furthermore, the null hypothesis of no mediation effect was rejected by the Sobel test (z -value = 4.18, $p < .001$) indicating that the mediation effect of meaningful work exists. Likewise, the three equations of Model 2 tested the mediation effect of meaningful work on adaptive selling behavior, and the results confirmed full mediation. Sobel test value ($z = 2.82$, $p < .05$), in this case, was also significant indicating that the mediation effect exists.

Discussion

This study investigates how spirituality influences salespeople's customer-centric behaviors and considers the role played by meaningful work. Specifically, our results indicate that meaningful work acts as a mediator in the relationship between spirituality and the two salesperson behavioral variables: customer orientation and adaptive selling behavior. The results suggest several important theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

First, this study draws attention to the need to study the role of spirituality in sales literature. Spirituality has been gaining attention in organizational, management, and leadership research of late (Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram, 2008), but it has received scant attention in the context of marketing (Smith, 2007). Since sales and marketing is a discipline concerned with investigating human behavior (Hunt, 2002), the lack of investigation of something as fundamental to human existence as spirituality to understand boundary-spanner's behavior is alarming. This study takes a step to address this shortcoming. Second, the study introduces the unique perspective of the ego in sales literature. Noisy and quiet egos are two opposite characterizations of an individual's self in relation to others (Bauer and Wayment, 2008). The noisy ego is defensive and self-oriented, whereas the quiet ego is non-defensive and balances others' interests with one's own. Since the nature of a sales job is interactional and/or relational, the ego theory could play a significant role in explaining unresolved salesperson-customer interaction dynamics. Third, this study may be the first in the sales and marketing literature to provide empirical evidence for the effect of spirituality on customer orientation and adaptability. Previous research has ignored spirituality-related influences on salesperson's business outcomes. In spite of few conflicting results found by Franke and Park (2006) on the positive effects of customer orientation and adaptive selling behaviors on performance, there is wider consensus among scholars in the recent past that prove the existence of such positive relationships (Jaramillo *et al.*, 2007, Goad and Jaramillo, 2014, Terho *et al.*, 2015). However, in recognition of the fact that salespeople are doing soul-searching at work (Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram, 2008; Cohen, 1997), and that spirituality has been named as the greatest megatrend of our time (Aburdene, 2005), this study has attempted to highlight the benefits that spirituality can bring to the challenging job of a salesperson. In fact, spirituality has been found to have a significant

influence on reducing the job stress and increasing the job satisfaction (Altaf and Awan, 2011; Chawla and Guda, 2010). This study proves, subject to research limitations, not only that spirituality can co-exist with sales jobs, but that the two aspects complement each other. Fourth, this study reveals the process through which spirituality impacts customer-centric behaviors. Spirituality is found to impact meaning formation in work, wherein the salesperson commits to the social significance of the work. This meaning formation manifests itself in practice as customer-centric behaviors. This mediation is the reason why we did not obtain support for the direct relationship between spirituality and customer-centric behaviors. Thus, an enhanced understanding of spirituality in the sales context has been obtained.

Practical Implications

Our study found support for the mediation hypothesis (H3) that salesperson's spirituality affects customer orientation through meaningful work as full mediator. This finding has practical implications for sales organizations that are not afraid to invite salespeople's spirituality at workplace, but want some evidence of its effectiveness before they begin. As this study provides evidence that spirituality may indirectly influence salesperson's customer orientation which is one of the characteristic that differentiates high-performing salespeople from low-performing ones (Keillor *et al.*, 2000), sales organizations should devise appropriate programs to address salespersons' spiritual quests. There is already evidence that salespeople are attending spiritual conventions, meditating to kick-start their work-day on a positive note, attending Zen retreats, as well as starting sales meetings with prayers (Cohen, 1997). We suggest utilizing an inclusive secular approach to spirituality-enhancing programs, such as deep-breathing and relaxation exercises, meditation, yoga, etc., which would face minimum resistance from the employees. The finding from hypothesis 3 also has practical implications for sales organizations that are afraid to

discuss about salespeople's spirituality at workplace. Since meaningful work fully mediates the relationships and there is no direct effect of spirituality on customer orientation, sales organizations that are skeptical to promote spirituality at workplace (as it is highly sensitive and personal aspect) could concentrate on using following alternative ways to influence meaningful work that has direct effect on customer orientation: (1) offering broader definitions of the sales team's goals (Singh and Singh, 2009), (2) promoting an organizational purpose that goes beyond economic aims, and taps directly into the contribution the organization's work makes to the welfare of customers (Thomas, 2009).

Our study found support for the mediation hypothesis (H4) that salesperson's spirituality affects adaptive selling behavior through meaningful work as full mediator. As adaptive selling behavior enhances sales performance (Franke and Park, 2006), customer satisfaction and retention (Roman and Iacobucci, 2009), it becomes important for sales organizations to embrace spirituality as it indirectly affects adaptive selling behavior. We suggest that sales organizations may include spirituality in the battery of psychometric tests that are used during the salesperson selection process. This would ensure that selected applicants will have better chances to achieve higher sales performance.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Few limitations leading to opportunities for future research are given. First, the research design is cross-sectional in nature due to which any causal sequence between measures cannot be confirmed to exist. Interested researchers may look to establish the relationships in longitudinal design. Second, although we used Piedmont's (1999) universal measure of spirituality, the use of a spirituality scale which is reflective of Indian culture and the predominant religious context (Hinduism) is desirable, because spirituality is best measured through religion and ideology-

specific assessments (Moberg, 2002). Interested researchers can develop a measure suitable to the Indian context which would provide greater specificity to results. Third, the data for both the independent and dependent variables was collected from the individual sales professionals and as such may create same-source bias. While we used tests in this research to confirm the absence of any such bias, research that collects data from different sources is desirable. Finally, since two of the constructs in this study had low average variance extracted values, the results of this study could be labeled as provisional and requires replication.

Apart from the future research opportunities arising from limitations, the study offers the following future directions: (1) the relationship of spirituality could be explored with positive selling behaviors related to customer orientation such as ethical sales behavior and salesperson service behavior, as well as negative salesperson behaviors such as deviant behaviors. These sales behaviors are important to salespeople as they have an impact on sales performance (Ahearne *et al.*, 2007, Hansen and Riggle, 2009). The theory of ego may come useful to propose the above relationships. (2) The salespeople sample selected for this study were all employed by organizations that neither invite nor suppress spirituality. It would be revealing to investigate the model with salespeople from organizations which actively support or suppress spirituality.

APPENDIX A
CFA MODEL RESULTS

Constructs and Items	Standardized Loadings
Spirituality (CR = .91, AVE = .62)	
<i>Prayer Fulfillment</i>	
In my prayers or meditations, I find true happiness	.93
Prayers or meditations provide me with care and support	.86
<i>Universality</i>	
I feel that all of us are like the leaves and branches of one single tree	.75
Spirituality binds all people together	.71
<i>Connectedness</i>	
I have done things in my life because I believed it would please my near and dear who died	.73
Memories and thoughts of some of my relatives who passed away continue to influence my life	.72
Meaningful Work (CR = .75, AVE = .38)	
Selling gives me a chance to help people	.69
Selling gives me a chance to use my talents or potentials	.61
I see great potential for my sales career	.54
I have a sense of personal mission in life, which selling helps me to fulfill	.60
Selling provides me a sense of joy	.64
Customer Orientation (CR = .78, AVE = .34)	
I try to achieve my goals by satisfying customers	.62
I try to get customers to discuss their needs with me	.62
I try to influence a customer by information rather than by pressure	.62
I offer the product/service that is best suited to the customer's problem	.51
I answer a customer's questions about products as correctly as I can	.52
To help a customer make a better decision, I am willing to even disagree with him sometimes	.58
I try to give an accurate expectation of what the product will do for him	.58
Adaptive Selling Behavior (CR = .78, AVE = .47)	
I am very flexible in the selling technique I use	.61
I can easily use a wide variety of selling techniques	.75
I vary my sales style from situation to situation	.79
I like to experiment with different sales techniques	.57

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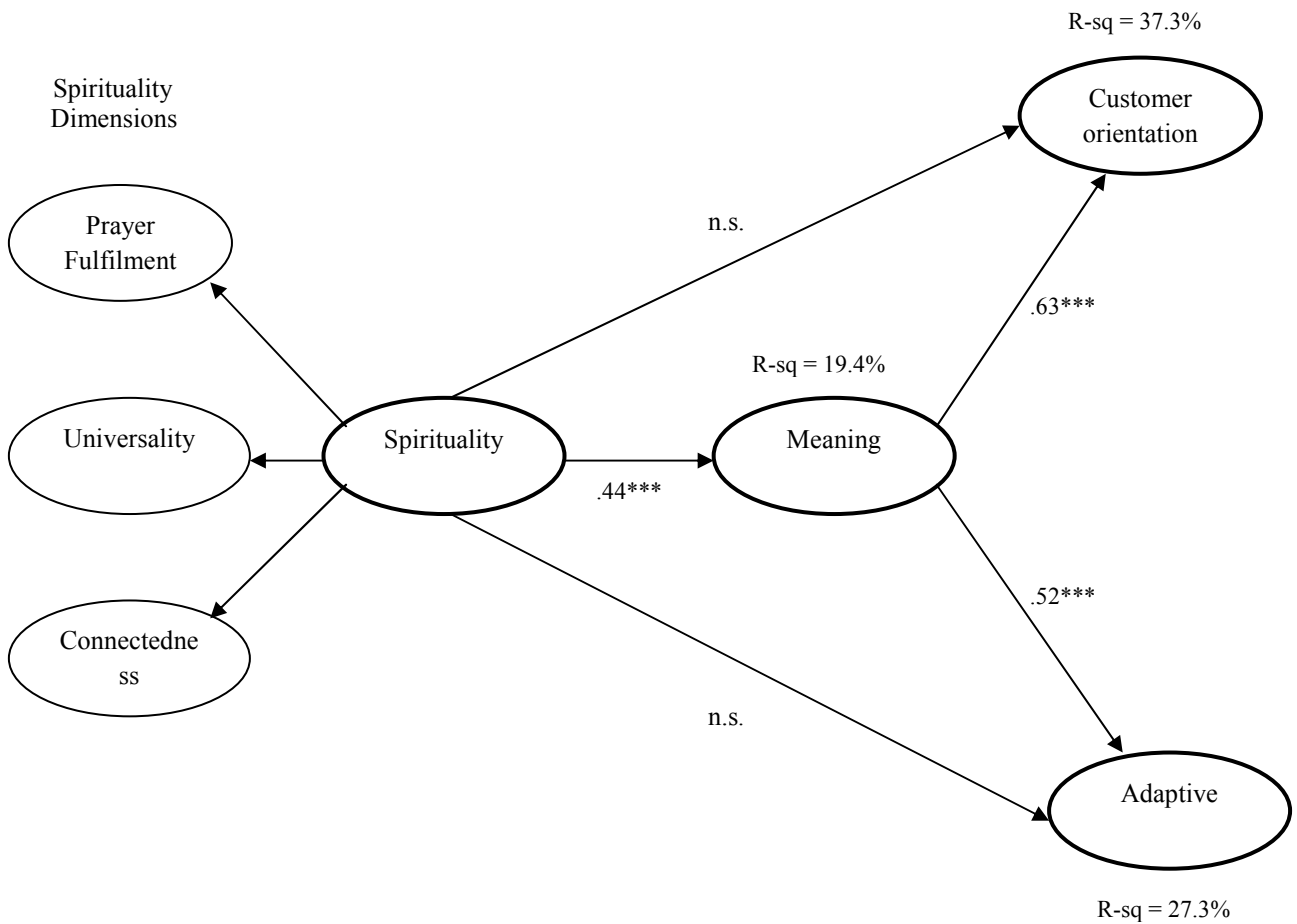
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FIGURE 1
MEDIATION MODEL



*** indicates significance at $P < .001$ (Two-tailed)

TABLE 1**^aMEASURE CORRELATIONS AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Individual Spirituality	1.00	.43*** (.19)	.23* (.05)	.23* (.05)
2. Meaningful Work	.43*** (.19)	1.00	.56*** (.31)	.46*** (.21)
3. Customer Orientation	.23* (.05)	.56*** (.31)	1.00	.53*** (.28)
4. Adaptive Selling Behavior	.23* (.05)	.46*** (.21)	.53*** (.28)	1.00
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	.62	.38	.34	.47
Means	4.02	4.39	6.47	6.40
Std. Deviations	.77	.59	.56	.67
No. of Items	6	5	7	4

^aReported Measure correlations are coefficients from confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

*** and * indicates significance, respectively, at .001 and .05 level (two-tailed).

Numbers in parentheses () are shared variances

Variables No. 1-2 and 3-4 were measured, respectively, on 5-point and 7-point Likert scale.

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF STANDARDIZED DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS

Hypothesis	Effect	CI _{low}	CI _{high}	Support?
<i>Direct Effects (SEM with Bootstrap)</i>				
Spirituality → Customer Orientation	-.06	-.65	.52	No
Spirituality → Adaptive Selling Behavior	.00	-.69	.51	No
<i>Indirect Effects (SEM with Bootstrap)</i>				
Between Spirituality and Customer Orientation through Meaningful Work	.28*	.11	2.16	Yes
Between Spirituality and Adaptive Selling Behavior through Meaningful Work	.23*	.07	1.91	Yes

*p<.05

TABLE 3
MEDIATION TESTS FOR MEANINGFUL WORK

	Model 1-1	Model 1-2	Model 1-3	Model 2-1	Model 2-2	Model 2-3
	Dependent Variable					
	Meaningful Work	Customer Orientation	Customer Orientation	Meaningful Work	Adaptive Selling Behavior	Adaptive Selling Behavior
Spirituality	.29***	.18*	.06	.29***	.15*	.06
Meaningful Work	-	-	.39***	-	-	.29***
Sobel Test		z-value = 4.18***			z-value = 2.82**	

Note: *, ** and *** indicates significance, respectively, at $p < .05$, $p < .01$ and $p < .001$ level.