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57

Predicting salespeople's performance, cross-selling and up-selling: interactions between personality, satisfaction with the rewards system and leader–member exchange

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Abstract

Purpose – The present study investigated the moderating role of satisfaction with the rewards system and leader–member exchange (LMX) in the relationships between two narrow personality traits (achievement-striving from conscientiousness and activity level from extraversion) and overall sales performance, cross-selling and up-selling.

Design/methodology/approach – The sample of the study consisted of 381 salespeople in the insurance industry who completed all scales at one point in time. Confirmatory factor analysis, reliability analysis, descriptive statistics and correlations were computed in R. The moderation analyses were also conducted in R using observed variables.

Findings – Both achievement-striving and activity level were positively related to sales performance and cross-selling. The relationships with up-selling were not significant. Satisfaction with the rewards system moderated the relationships with cross-selling. The associations between both narrow personality traits and cross-selling were the strongest when satisfaction was low. LMX only moderated the relationship between activity level and cross-selling. The link between these two variables was the strongest when LMX was low.

Practical implications – Results support the use of personality tests that measure narrow traits for the selection of salespeople. When there are no ways to select salespeople based on personality traits, organizations can find solutions to increase satisfaction with the rewards system or to implement LMX interventions.

Originality/value – This study explores the psychological complexity of the personality–performance relationship by highlighting specific conditions in which personality predicts sales performance.

Keywords Sales performance, Cross-selling, Up-selling, Achievement-striving, Activity level

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Since sales performance is of major importance for organizations, due to its impact on profitability and cash flow (Vinchur *et al.*, 1998), researchers have conducted extensive studies on sales performance predictors, such as individual differences, attitudes, leadership (Verbeke *et al.*, 2011) or sales control policies and systems (Cho and Nam, 2024; Küster and Canales, 2011). However, less attention has been paid to the interaction between these predictors. Even less is known about the interaction between these factors in predicting cross-selling (the sale of additional products or services to the same customer; Johnson and Friend, 2015) and up-selling (upgrading the customer into a more expensive version of the product or service; Johnson and Friend, 2015). The present study aims to address these gaps by investigating the moderating

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role of satisfaction with the rewards system and leader–member exchange (the dyadic relationship between leader and subordinate, characterized by mutual professional respect, loyalty, reciprocal contributions and affective trust; LMX; Dulebohn *et al.*, 2012) in the interaction between narrow traits and a series of sales performance criteria.

Based on the cognitive and affective processing system framework (CAPS; Mischel, 2004; Mischel and Shoda, 2008), we expect two narrow personality traits, achievement-striving (conscientiousness) and activity level (extraversion), to be positively related to sales performance, cross-selling and up-selling. In line with the situational strength approach (Meyer *et al.*, 2009), we expect both narrow traits to be more strongly related to sales performance criteria at low levels of satisfaction and LMX than at high levels of satisfaction and LMX. From a theoretical perspective, this study explores the psychological complexity of the personality–performance relationship by highlighting specific conditions in which personality predicts sales performance. From a practical perspective, this study can provide guidance for recruitment practices (selecting individuals based on narrow personality traits). Moreover, the results can support the implementation of benefits system redesign or LMX training when selection based on personality traits is not possible. Previous studies already support the effectiveness of compensation system changes (Johnson *et al.*, 2016) and LMX interventions (Scandura and Graen, 1984) in increasing employee productivity.

Sales performance

Although there are many definitions of sales performance in the scientific literature, many of these definitions include two components: the outcomes achieved by salespersons (e.g. volume of sales units, revenue, market share, new accounts and profitability) and their behaviors (e.g. effective communication, making sales calls and managing time) (Singh and Koshy, 2010). Enhancing the performance of salespeople is arguably the most crucial responsibility of sales managers in the business landscape. Therefore, researchers have been studying for a long time the factors that could be associated with sales performance, with meta-analyses on this subject including hundreds of studies (Boles *et al.*, 2000). Salespersons' knowledge, customer orientation, job satisfaction and job involvement were identified among the predictors of sales performance (Boles *et al.*, 2000; Singh and Koshy, 2010). Other factors that were proposed as predictors of performance were salespeople's personality, the leadership style of their managers or sales control policies and systems (Cho and Nam, 2024; Küster and Canales, 2011; Verbeke *et al.*, 2011). However, the interaction between these predictors has received less attention. The present study seeks to address these gaps by examining the moderating role of satisfaction with the rewards system and LMX in the relationship between narrow personality traits (achievement-striving and activity level) and various sales performance criteria (sales behaviors, cross-selling and up-selling).

Achievement-striving and activity level

Meta-analytical findings support a positive association between conscientiousness and sales performance (Vinchur *et al.*, 1998), with a series of explanatory mechanisms highlighted in the literature. Salespeople high in conscientiousness are more likely to set goals and are more committed to their goals, which in turn leads to higher performance (Barrick *et al.*, 1993). Conscientious sellers are also more oriented towards accomplishment striving and status striving, enabling them to perform better (Barrick *et al.*, 2002). Finally, they are more self-efficacious, which makes them more successful in sales (Yang *et al.*, 2011). These mediation relationships can be explained by CAPS (Mischel, 2004; Mischel and Shoda, 2008). CAPS is a theoretical framework that explains personality as a stable system of mental representations that interact with situational features to produce behavior. Rather than focusing on global traits alone, CAPS emphasizes how personality operates through cognitive-affective units (CAUs), such as goals, beliefs and self-regulatory strategies, that are activated in specific contexts. This perspective integrates both dispositional and dynamic views of personality. CAPS argues that

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there are five sub-systems of personality, called CAUs, that process information from the environment in order to generate behaviors: encodings (categories for construing the world); expectancies and beliefs about the world (e.g. self-efficacy); affects; goals and values; competencies and self-regulatory plans. Conscientious sellers will interpret work activity as a means of obtaining accomplishments and status (i.e. desirable outcomes related to the goals and values CAU), they will set goals and they will be committed to them (i.e. dispositions also related to the goals and values CAU), and they will see themselves able to achieve these goals (i.e. the self-efficacy related to expectancies and beliefs CAU).

These interpretations of CAUs will generate positive organizational behaviors, such as sales performance. The same reasoning can be applied to narrow traits. Based on CAPS assumptions, we expect achievement-striving (the narrow component of conscientiousness related to striving for success) to be positively associated with sales performance, cross-selling and up-selling. In line with our prediction, achievement-striving was found to be a strong predictor of sales performance (Vinchur *et al.*, 1998). Achievement-striving can be positively associated with sales performance because it reflects a persistent drive to set ambitious goals, maintain effort despite setbacks and remain focused on meeting performance targets. This narrow trait may enhance cross-selling performance, as individuals high in this trait tend to approach each sales interaction as an opportunity to exceed expectations and deliver additional value. They are more likely to engage in discretionary effort aimed at broadening the scope of a sale by identifying and responding to complementary customer needs. Achievement-striving may also support up-selling behaviors by motivating individuals to pursue challenging goals, such as persuading customers to invest in higher-value options. This behavior aligns with the status-oriented dimension of achievement-striving, as successful up-selling is often linked to recognition and performance-based rewards.

H1a. Achievement-striving is positively related to sales performance.

H1b. Achievement-striving is positively related to cross-selling.

H1c. Achievement-striving is positively related to up-selling.

Meta-analytical findings support a positive association between extraversion and sales performance as well (Vinchur *et al.*, 1998). The positive link between these two variables is mediated by self-efficacy (Yang *et al.*, 2011) and status striving (Barrick *et al.*, 2002). Beyond these explanatory mechanisms, three main reasons have been proposed in the literature why extroverts may perform better in sales (Grant, 2013). First, being sociable and outgoing, extroverts find it easier to interact with many new people every day. Second, being confident and enthusiastic, extroverts can more easily persuade people to buy goods or services. Finally, sellers are frequently rejected, and extroverts are more persistent than introverts in trying to change others' point of view. These explanations are in accordance with CAPS (Mischel, 2004; Mischel and Shoda, 2008). Due to their specific CAUs, extroverted sellers may interpret their professional activity as an opportunity to obtain status, they may feel more confident in their abilities (both related to goals and values CAU), and they may persuade and interact with more people easily (dispositions related to competencies and self-regulatory plans CAU). The interaction between these CAUs may generate behaviors associated with sales performance.

The same explanation can be applied to narrow traits of extraversion. We expect that activity level (the narrow trait of extraversion that captures a high level of energy reflected in always doing something) will be positively related to sales performance, cross-selling and up-selling. Meta-analytical results have already shown that potency (the narrow dimension of extraversion that captures energy and influence) is a strong predictor of sales performance (Vinchur *et al*., 1998). Individuals high in activity level are likely to invest more time and effort in initiating client interactions, following up persistently and sustaining high levels of task involvement. This can translate into higher general sales performance, as such individuals are better equipped to manage the demands of fast-paced, high-volume sales environments. In the context of cross-selling, activity level may facilitate broader engagement with customers,

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enabling salespeople to explore additional needs or suggest complementary products during the same interaction. Their natural inclination toward action increases the likelihood of seizing these opportunities rather than settling for the primary sale. In the case of up-selling, individuals high in activity level might be more likely to take initiative in presenting premium options and sustaining the effort required to persuade customers.

H2a. Activity level is positively related to sales performance.

H2b. Activity level is positively related to cross-selling.

H2c. Activity level is positively related to up-selling.

Satisfaction with the rewards system and leader–member exchange as moderators

CAPS emphasizes the role of the situation in the expression of personality (Mischel, 2004). Mischel (1973) argues that certain contexts diminish the role of personality in the manifestation of behaviors, because the (work) environment can induce uniformity through similar expectancies regarding the most appropriate conduct, through rewards for that conduct, and by instilling the same skills for all individuals. These contexts are usually called strong situations (Judge and Zapata, 2015). In strong situations, individuals behave more homogeneously because the expression of individual differences is restricted (Meyer *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, strong situations lead to lower validities for personality traits (including conscientiousness and extraversion) in predicting job performance (Judge and Zapata, 2015). On the other hand, in weak situations, the manifestation of individual differences is not restricted and, therefore, individuals differ more in terms of their behavior (Meyer *et al.*, 2009). Weak situations increase the validity of personality traits in predicting organizational outcomes. For example, Meyer and colleagues (2009) highlighted in their meta-analysis that the magnitude of the correlation between conscientiousness and job performance is dependent on how strong or weak the situation is. The authors argue that the validity of the personality trait conscientiousness as a predictor of job performance is not uniform but varies depending on the situational characteristics of the occupation.

A variable that could increase the strength of a situation is sellers' satisfaction with the rewards system. In the current study, satisfaction with the rewards system was measured using four dimensions: satisfaction with salary, promotion, benefits and contingent rewards. These reflect both fixed (e.g. salary and benefits) and variable (e.g. promotion opportunities) components of compensation. Compensation can be a factor of work motivation (Igalens and Roussel, 1999), and pay level satisfaction is positively related to objective performance measures (Williams *et al.*, 2006). Previous studies already highlighted the positive link between salespeople's job satisfaction and their performance (Singh and Das, 2013). In this study, satisfaction with the rewards system includes evaluative responses to salary, promotion opportunities, benefits and recognition for good performance (Spector, 1985). We expect that higher satisfaction with these reward components enhances extrinsic motivation and performance consistency, thereby reducing variability in behavior and, in turn, limiting the expression of individual personality differences. From the perspective of CAPS, highly satisfying reward structures represent stronger situations (contexts that promote uniform behavioral responses through clear incentives and reinforcement mechanisms). These strong situations may diminish the observable effects of personality traits such as achievement-striving and activity level. Conversely, when satisfaction with the rewards system is low, the situational strength is weakened. In such weaker situations, extrinsic reinforcement is inconsistent or absent, and individuals are more likely to rely on internal dispositions to guide their actions. This aligns with CAPS theory, which predicts that in less structured environments, stable personality traits exert a stronger influence on behavior.

H3a. Satisfaction with the rewards system moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and sales performance, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of satisfaction than at high levels of satisfaction.

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H3b. Satisfaction with the rewards system moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and cross-selling, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of satisfaction than at high levels of satisfaction.

H3c. Satisfaction with the rewards system moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and up-selling, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of satisfaction than at high levels of satisfaction.

The leader–subordinate relationship is another factor that could determine how strong a workplace situation is. A central construct that describes this relationship is LMX, representing an exchange between leader and follower that is based on mutual professional respect, loyalty, contribution and affectivity (Liden and Maslyn, 1998). LMX stimulates followers' performance and creativity by enhancing their self-efficacy (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2011) and their level of energy (Atwater and Carmeli, 2009). Research supports the importance of leadership in salespeople's performance. LMX enhances subordinates' relational behaviors, which in turn positively affect sales effectiveness (Paparoidamis and Guenzi, 2009). A recent study carried out in a Fortune 100 financial services company indicated that sales managers who create an employee-centric culture can generate better results in terms of overall sales performance (Conde *et al.*, 2024). From a CAPS perspective, these mediators (self-efficacy, energy and relational behavior) correspond to CAUs that are especially active in employees high in extraversion. However, when a strong LMX is present, these CAUs may be triggered in most employees, regardless of dispositional differences, due to consistent reinforcement and leader-driven cues. Therefore, LMX may induce uniformity in behavior related to extraversion, resulting in less behavioral variability across individuals. In situations with high LMX, sellers' behavior may be more homogeneous, leading to similar levels of performance.

Conscientiousness is more strongly related to task and contextual performance at low levels of LMX than at high levels of LMX (Jawahar and Carr, 2007; Kamdar and Van Dyne, 2007). This pattern suggests that in weak interpersonal situations, characterized by low-quality LMX, individuals rely more heavily on internal dispositional factors to guide their behavior. In contrast, in high-LMX contexts, where performance-related behaviors are more clearly reinforced, the influence of personality traits on performance tends to diminish. Building on this logic and drawing from CAPS, a similar moderation effect can be expected for narrow traits that fall under the broader conscientiousness domain, such as achievement-striving. In less structured relational contexts, achievement-striving individuals may proactively set personal goals, persist in the face of obstacles, and self-regulate their effort in the absence of external reinforcement. However, in high-LMX relationships, where directions are consistently provided by the leader, these behaviors may become more uniform across employees, thus reducing the relative contribution of achievement-striving to performance outcomes.

H4a. LMX moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and sales performance, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of LMX than at high levels of LMX.

H4b. LMX moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and cross-selling, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of LMX than at high levels of LMX.

H4c. LMX moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and up-selling, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of LMX than at high levels of LMX.

Method

Participants and procedure

The sample of the study consisted of 381 Romanian workers in the insurance industry. The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Sales managers are part of a sales

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Table 1. Sample characteristics ($N = 381$)

	Percentage
Gender	
Male	40.2%
Female	59.8%
Age	
Between 20 and 29 years old	8.7%
Between 30 and 39 years old	21.5%
Between 40 and 49 years old	34.1%
Between 50 and 59 years old	26.2%
60 years and over	9.4%
Occupation	
Insurance agents	29.9%
Brokerage assistants	30.4%
Life insurance consultants	11.3%
Sales managers	28.3%
Work experience	
Less than one year of experience	5.8%
One to three years	11%
Three to five years	6.8%
Five to ten years	18.6%
Over ten years of experience	57.7%

Source(s): Authors' own creation

network where they not only supervise and recruit new agents, but are also directly responsible for generating their own sales. As such, they were included in the sample due to their active sales role, which aligns with the study's focus. Participants completed the questionnaire in a paper-and-pencil or online form. The paper-and-pencil forms were distributed during team events (e.g. trainings and team buildings) in order to increase participation among individuals who had not completed the online version. The original database consisted of 483 participants, but 102 responses were removed due to missing values. Most of the excluded responses came from paper-and-pencil forms (93 of the incomplete responses, representing 91.18%) and were missing at least 20% of the questionnaire items, often across multiple scales, which led us to remove them to maintain data quality and reliability. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the data.

Data were collected from a convenience sample by using the snowball sampling method in the insurance industry. Snowball sampling was employed due to its effectiveness in identifying and recruiting participants who are part of a specific network (i.e. insurance sales agents' network). This method was particularly suitable for our study as it allowed us to leverage existing connections to reach a wider, yet targeted, participant pool that might have been difficult to access through traditional sampling methods. Snowball sampling is advantageous in situations where a study aims to gather information from a specific, interconnected group. Additionally, it facilitated the collection of rich, detailed data by encouraging participation through trusted referrals. All the respondents included in the study had a direct supervisor.

Measures

Achievement-striving was measured with a self-report 10-item scale from the Romanian version of the International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg *et al.*, 2006; Iliescu *et al.*, 2015). The items (e.g. I go straight for the goal) are scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 5 (describes me very well). This scale was selected because it captures goal-oriented striving behaviors highly relevant in sales contexts. Activity level was measured with a self-report 10-item scale from the Romanian version of the International

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Personality Item Pool (Goldberg *et al*., 2006; Iliescu *et al*., 2015). The items (e.g. I do a lot in my spare time) are scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 5 (describes me very well). This trait was selected because it reflects high energy and behavioral activation, attributes that the literature has linked to extraversion and sales success. To ensure linguistic equivalence of the items, the back-translation method was employed. Each item was independently translated from English into Romanian by three fluent bilingual translators and then back into English to verify accuracy and consistency (Iliescu *et al*., 2015). The internal consistency for achievement-striving was 0.70, while for activity level, it was 0.55 in the validation study conducted for the Romanian-language instruments (Iliescu *et al*., 2015). The IPIP (2025) provides a comprehensive table detailing the Cronbach's alpha of various facet scales, including achievement-striving and activity level. According to this resource, the internal consistency for the achievement-striving facet is reported as 0.78, and for the activity level facet is reported as 0.71.

Sales performance was measured with the self-report scale developed by Behrman and Perreault (1982). It assesses five dimensions: sales objectives (e.g. quickly generating sales of new company products), technical knowledge (e.g. knowing the applications and functions of company products), providing information (e.g. submitting required reports on time), controlling expenses (e.g. operating within the budgets set by the company) and sales presentations (e.g. convincing customers that you understand their unique problems and concerns). All 31 items are rated on a 7-point scale, from 1 (this aspect requires improvement) to 7 (this aspect is exceptional). This scale is one of the most widely used and validated measures of sales performance, offering broad coverage of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of selling effectiveness.

Cross-selling and up-selling were measured with the self-report scale constructed by Johnson and Friend (2015). The scale consists of 4 items for cross-selling (e.g. when I have sold the customer a product, I push to see if they have needs for other products that my company sells) and 4 items for up-selling (e.g. I sell customers on the notion that buying higher-end versions of products from my company will increase the status of their account) rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). This scale was chosen because it specifically targets the two selling behaviors central to the present study.

Satisfaction with the rewards system was measured with four dimensions from the self-report Job Satisfaction Survey (Spector, 1985): satisfaction with salary (e.g. I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do), promotion (e.g. those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted), benefits (e.g. the benefits we receive are as good as most other organizations offer) and contingent rewards (e.g. when I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive). Each dimension was measured with four items on a 6-point Likert agreement scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). These facets were selected to capture a broad range of compensation-related experiences, covering both fixed components (e.g. salary and benefits) and variable components (e.g. promotion opportunities) relevant to employees' perceptions of workplace rewards.

LMX was measured with the 12-item version of the self-report LMX–Multidimensional Measure (Liden and Maslyn, 1998). It assesses four dimensions, with three items each: affectivity (e.g. my supervisor is the kind of person one would like to have as a friend), loyalty (e.g. my supervisor would defend me to others in the organization if I made an honest mistake), contribution (e.g. I do not mind working my hardest for my supervisor) and professional respect (e.g. I respect my supervisor's knowledge of and competence on the job). All items are rated on a 7-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). This measure was chosen for its strong psychometric properties and widespread use in organizational behavior research, particularly in studies linking leader behavior to subordinate performance.

Statistical approach

In order to test the factor structure of the measures, we conducted a Confirmatory Factor Analysis using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) in R 3.6.1 (R Core Team, 2019). The fit of

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the model was evaluated based on the following indicators: Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals (SRMR). An acceptable fit of the model is indicated by values above 0.90 for CFI and TLI and values less than or equal to 0.08 for SRMR and less than or equal to 0.06 for RMSEA (Bentler, 1990; Hu and Bentler, 1999). We tested a first-order seven-factor measurement model using parcels (Little *et al.*, 2013; Nasser-Abu Alhija and Wisenbaker, 2006). Achievement-striving and activity level, as latent constructs, were loaded by three parcels each. Parcels represented the mean of three or four items allocated to the same parcel based on similar content. Sales performance was loaded by its five components as manifest variables (each representing the mean of the items specific to each component). Cross-selling and up-selling were each loaded by their four specific items. Satisfaction with the rewards system and LMX were each loaded by their four specific dimensions as manifest variables (each representing the mean of the items specific to every dimension). Cronbach's alpha reliabilities were computed using the psych package (Revelle, 2020) for R. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations were computed using the apaTables package (Stanley, 2021) for R with observed variables. The moderation analyses were performed using the processR package (White, 2019) for R with observed variables.

Results

Measurement model, descriptive statistics and correlations between the variables

The fit indices for the seven-factor measurement model (χ^2 = 689.745, df = 303, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, SRMR = 0.06) showed an acceptable fit with the data. According to the results, the measures adopted in our study were valid. Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, reliabilities and zero-order correlations among the variables included in the study. In our study, we observed an internal consistency of 0.67 for the activity level scale, which is slightly below the IPIP-reported value. This variation may be attributed to factors such as sample characteristics, cultural differences or the translation process. Notably, previous research on the Romanian adaptation of the IPIP reported an internal consistency of 0.55 for the activity level scale (Iliescu *et al.*, 2015), indicating that our obtained reliability is within an expected range for this measure in Romanian samples. Given these considerations, we opted to retain the activity level scale without modification to preserve its theoretical breadth and comparability with existing research. Hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported, but not Hypothesis 1c. Achievement-striving was positively and significantly correlated with sales performance and cross-selling, but not with up-selling. Hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported, but not Hypothesis 2c. Activity level was positively correlated with sales performance and cross-selling, but showed no significant correlation with up-selling.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations among study variables (N = 381)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Achievement-striving	4.17	0.55	(0.79)						
2. Activity level	3.43	0.58	0.44**	(0.67)					
3. Sales performance	4.95	1.18	0.33**	0.15**	(0.97)				
4. Cross-selling	6.03	1.04	0.37**	0.14**	0.40**	(0.89)			
5. Up-selling	3.31	1.78	0.01	−0.02	0.16**	0.20**	(0.91)		
6. Satisfaction with the rewards system	4.09	0.93	0.24**	0.02	0.14**	0.13**	−0.04	(0.87)	
7. Leader-member exchange	5.57	1.18	0.19**	0.02	0.23**	0.22**	0.05	0.44**	(94)

Note(s): Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are in parentheses on the diagonal, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

Source(s): Authors' own creation

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Moderation analysis

The interaction between achievement-striving and satisfaction with the rewards system did not predict sales performance ($b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = 0.88$, $p = 0.38$) or up-selling ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = -0.15$, $p = 0.88$). The interaction between achievement-striving and satisfaction with the rewards system only predicted cross-selling ($b = -0.20$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = -2.12$, $p < 0.05$), the association between achievement-striving and cross-selling being the strongest when satisfaction was low ($b = 0.85$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 6.97$, $p < 0.001$). The hierarchical regression explained 15% of the variance in cross-selling performance ($R^2 = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$), with a medium effect size (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.18$). This moderation effect is shown in Figure 1.

The interaction between activity level and satisfaction with the rewards system did not predict sales performance ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = -0.81$, $p = 0.42$) or up-selling ($b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = -0.73$, $p = 0.47$). The interaction between activity level and satisfaction with the rewards system predicted cross-selling ($b = -0.28$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = -3.24$, $p < 0.001$), the association between activity level and cross-selling being the strongest when satisfaction was low ($b = 0.53$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 4.24$, $p < 0.001$). The regression model explained 6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$), corresponding to a small effect size (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.07$). This moderation effect is shown in Figure 2. Hypotheses 3a and 3c were not supported. Only hypothesis 3b was supported.

The interaction between achievement-striving and leader-member exchange did not predict sales performance ($b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 1.04$, $p = 0.30$), cross-selling ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -1.01$, $p = 0.31$) or up-selling ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = -0.22$, $p = 0.82$). The interaction between activity level and leader-member exchange did not predict sales performance ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -0.28$, $p = 0.78$) or up-selling ($b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = -0.42$, $p = 0.67$). The interaction between activity level and LMX predicted cross-selling ($b = -0.14$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -2.03$, $p < 0.05$), the association between activity level and cross-selling being the strongest when LMX was low ($b = 0.41$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 3.40$, $p < 0.001$). In the regression model, the predictors explained 7% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.07$, $p < 0.001$). The corresponding effect size (Cohen's $f^2 = 0.08$) indicates a small impact. This moderation effect is shown in Figure 3. Hypotheses 4a and 4c were not supported. Only hypothesis 4b was partially supported. The results for all hypotheses are presented in Table 3.

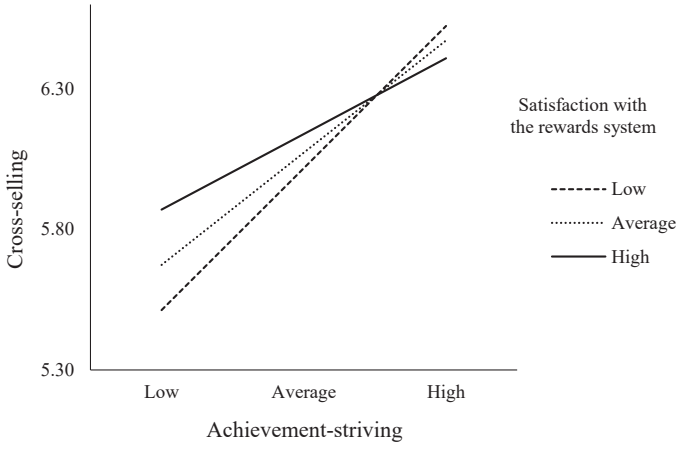


Figure 1. Simple slopes of achievement-striving predicting cross-selling for 1 SD below the mean of satisfaction with the rewards system, the mean of satisfaction with the rewards system and 1 SD above the mean of satisfaction with the rewards system. Source: Authors' own creation

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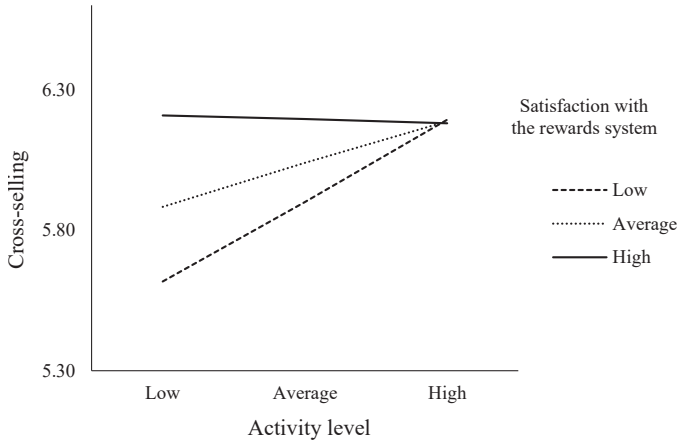


Figure 2. Simple slopes of activity level predicting cross-selling for 1 SD below the mean of satisfaction with the rewards system, the mean of satisfaction with the rewards system and 1 SD above the mean of satisfaction with the rewards system. Source: Authors' own creation

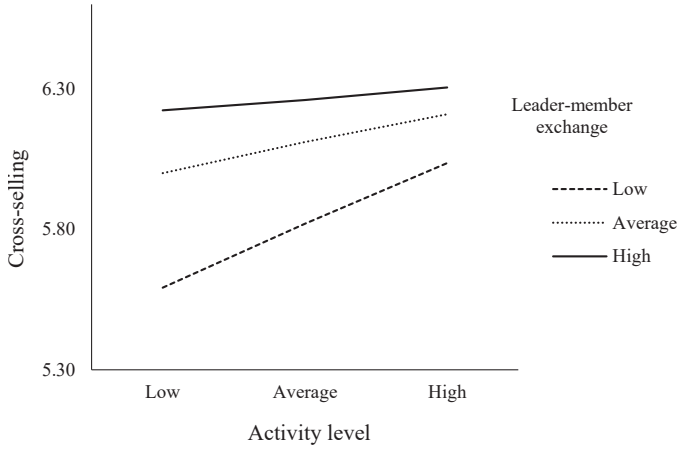


Figure 3. Simple slopes of activity level predicting cross-selling for 1 SD below the mean of LMX, the mean of LMX and 1 SD above the mean of LMX. Source: Authors' own creation

Discussion

Theoretical and practical implications

While only partially supported, our hypotheses provide nuanced insights into the personality–performance dynamic in sales. Achievement-striving and activity level significantly predicted cross-selling and general sales performance, but not up-selling. The interaction between satisfaction with the rewards system and both personality traits predicted cross-selling but did not predict performance or up-selling. Our results suggest that the positive relationship between activity level and cross-selling became stronger as the quality of the leader–member relationship decreased. LMX did not moderate the relationship between personality traits and sales performance or up-selling. One particularly original finding is that achievement-striving predicted cross-selling more strongly when satisfaction with the rewards system was low. This

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Table 3. The results for each hypothesis

Hypothesis	Results
Hypothesis 1a: Achievement-striving is positively related to sales performance	Supported
Hypothesis 1b: Achievement-striving is positively related to cross-selling	Supported
Hypothesis 1c: Achievement-striving is positively related to up-selling	Not supported
Hypothesis 2a: Activity level is positively related to sales performance	Supported
Hypothesis 2b: Activity level is positively related to cross-selling	Supported
Hypothesis 2c: Activity level is positively related to up-selling	Not supported
Hypothesis 3a: Satisfaction with the rewards system moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and sales performance, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of satisfaction than at high levels of satisfaction	Not supported
Hypothesis 3b: Satisfaction with the rewards system moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and cross-selling, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of satisfaction than at high levels of satisfaction	Supported
Hypothesis 3c: Satisfaction with the rewards system moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and up-selling, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of satisfaction than at high levels of satisfaction	Not supported
Hypothesis 4a: LMX moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and sales performance, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of LMX than at high levels of LMX.	Not supported
Hypothesis 4b: LMX moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and cross-selling, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of LMX than at high levels of LMX.	Partially supported (only for activity level)
Hypothesis 4c: LMX moderates the relationship between narrow personality traits and up-selling, such that the relationship is stronger at low levels of LMX than at high levels of LMX.	Not supported

Source(s): Authors' own creation

finding aligns with the situational strength perspective: under low satisfaction, the context becomes weaker, allowing individual differences to emerge more clearly. Thus, those high in achievement-striving stand out by putting greater effort into cross-selling and achieving better outcomes. In contrast, under high satisfaction, the context may become strong, leading to more uniform behavior and diminishing dispositional variance (Judge and Zapata, 2015). A possible explanation for the non-significant results in up-selling is that, unlike cross-selling, it requires persuading customers to accept more expensive options (an interaction involving greater perceived risk and resistance). While achievement-striving and activity level may foster initiative, they may not be sufficient for up-selling. Also, in the insurance industry, pricing sensitivity may further limit up-selling effectiveness, regardless of personality.

Our findings contribute to theoretical debates on trait activation and situational strength by clarifying the boundary conditions in which narrow traits manifest in differentiated sales behaviors. Unlike previous studies, we distinguish cross-selling and up-selling as discrete outcomes and highlight that narrow personality traits predict only one of them. From a theoretical perspective, we followed the suggestions of Meyer *et al*. (2009) on answering the question "under what conditions do specific personality traits predict specific outcomes?". We have highlighted some complex interactions between narrow personality traits and specific performance criteria, which are in accordance with the assumptions of both CAPS (Mischel, 2004) and the situational strength approach (Meyer *et al*., 2009). The results of the study show that the relationship between personality and performance is dependent on the strength of the situation (i.e. high versus low levels of satisfaction with the rewards system and LMX).

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This study has three main practical implications for stimulating cross-selling. First, the findings highlight the value of integrating narrow personality traits into hiring decisions. By assessing achievement-striving and activity level, organizations can move beyond broad personality measures, particularly when strategic goals emphasize cross-selling. Such assessments should be integrated into a broader selection strategy that also considers training, experience and industry-specific knowledge. Although achievement-striving may be valuable in selection, managers should also address potential risks, such as burnout and work–life imbalance. Personality-based hiring should be balanced with organizational policies that promote psychological well-being and work–life balance. Second, when personality-based selection is not feasible, organizations can strengthen sales performance by adapting their rewards systems to available resources. When budgets allow, financial incentives such as performance-based bonuses or more frequent payouts can be introduced, while in resource-constrained contexts, non-monetary rewards like recognition, training opportunities or flexible work arrangements may sustain employee motivation. Third, organizations can actively improve sales performance by implementing leadership development programs focused on enhancing LMX (Scandura and Graen, 1984). The content of such programs should target practical behaviors such as demonstrating professional competence, supporting employees in case of honest mistakes or unfair criticism, fostering approachability and trust, encouraging discretionary effort beyond formal job roles and creating a positive and engaging work climate. By embedding these elements into structured workshops and coaching sessions, organizations can strengthen leader–member relationships and translate them into sales performance. However, given the rise of artificial intelligence, digital tools and remote selling platforms, future research should explore whether narrow personality traits maintain their predictive value in technology-driven sales contexts. These insights could support the adaptation of personality-based selection tools to modern sales environments.

Limitations and future directions

The present study has a number of limitations. First, all the variables were measured through self-report instruments, increasing the risk for common method bias (Tehseen *et al.*, 2017) and other biases such as social desirability. For example, we measured satisfaction with the rewards system instead of the actual reward structure. Also, we measured cross-selling and up-selling self-reported behaviors instead of actual cross-sales and up-sales. Cross-selling attempts may not lead to an actual sale and sometimes may even have negative effects, such as irritating customers and making them switch to another company (Güneş *et al.*, 2010). Future studies may use objective methods to measure performance (e.g. average number of sales referrals per month, commission as a percentage of sales, actual cross-sales and up-sales) and could explore the moderating effect of actual reward structures. A second limitation concerns the generalizability of the study's findings. The research was conducted exclusively with Romanian insurance salespeople, a specific context that may differ substantially from other industries or countries. Sales strategies, job structures and the relevance of personality traits can vary significantly across sectors such as retail, healthcare or technology. As such, the results and practical recommendations, particularly those related to hiring, should be interpreted with caution and not generalized beyond the studied context without further empirical validation.

A third limitation is the absence of control variables such as prior sales experience, job tenure, training or coaching received and team configuration. Each of these factors could provide alternative explanations for the observed relationships, as more experienced employees or those with extensive training may naturally achieve higher sales performance regardless of personality traits. Similarly, supportive colleagues could enhance performance outcomes independent of individual dispositions. Without accounting for these influences, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the findings are uniquely attributable to the predictors of interest. Future research should include these controls to better isolate the unique effects of

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the predictors. Fourth, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference; longitudinal studies would be more appropriate to test the directional assumptions proposed here. Another limitation of the study concerns the internal consistency of the activity level scale. In our sample, this scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.67, which is slightly below commonly accepted reliability thresholds. Future studies could consider using alternative personality assessments to measure this narrow trait in order to improve internal consistency and ensure more robust measurement of activity level.

We acknowledge that the exploratory nature of the study, the limited support for most hypotheses, the reliance on self-reported performance and the focus on a single industry restrict the generalizability and theoretical contribution of our findings. These constraints, however, also highlight clear directions for future research. This study can be viewed as an initial step in a broader research agenda aimed at investigating the role of narrow personality traits in predicting sales performance, with future studies encouraged to adopt more rigorous designs and improved measurements. Framing this work as a first study in a broader research agenda, we believe it can serve as a foundation for more robust and generalizable investigations of how narrow personality traits interact with contextual factors to shape sales performance.

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