Revisiting the Display Rule – Performance Debate:

The Role of Explicitness of Display Rules

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Abstract

We argue that the strength with which the organization communicates expectations regarding the appropriate emotional expression toward customers (i.e., explicitness of display rules) has an inverted U-shaped relationship with service delivery behaviors, customer satisfaction, and sales performance. Further, we argue that service organizations need a particular blend of explicitness of display rules and role discretion for the purpose of optimizing sales performance. As hypothesized, findings from two samples of salespeople suggest that either high or low explicitness of display rules impedes service delivery behaviors and sales performance, which peaks at moderate explicitness of display rules and high role discretion. The findings also suggest that the explicitness of display rules has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

Keywords: explicitness of display rules, role discretion, resource allocation theory, job demands-resources model, affective delivery, staff authenticity, customer-focused organizational citizenship behavior, customer satisfaction, sales performance, communication

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In order to improve service delivery and consequently performance, organizations use salespeople's expression of emotions as a means to influence customers' judgments regarding service quality and their level of satisfaction. This, in turn, influences future purchasing behavior (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001; Voss, Parasuraman, & Grewal, 1998) and customer willingness to recommend the firm to friends (Tsai & Huang, 2002), thereby contributing to financial and market performance (Schneider, Macey, Lee, & Young, 2009), and profitability (Burns & Neisner, 2006).

Thus, managers often endorse and communicate to salespeople certain display rules—that is, expectations that govern the expression of emotion toward customers—in order to elicit and shape service delivery behaviors meant to please customers (Hochschild, 1983). Training manuals and programs, handbooks, mission statements, and personnel briefings are some of the means used to convey display rules (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). For example, Hochschild (1983) documented that in addition to their initial training, Delta Airlines provides yearly training to flight attendants to ensure conformity with display rules. Mary Kay Ash, the founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics, even uses a company song making explicit the requirement of displaying enthusiasm toward potential customers (Ash, 1984).

Despite the prevalence and importance of display rules, scholars have put forth opposing assumptions regarding display rule effects on employee performance (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003; Goldberg & Grandey, 2007). In order to reconcile these conflicting views we adopt and test a resource allocation perspective (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Specifically, we examine the effects of *explicitness* of display rules (EDR)—that is, the strength with which the organization communicates display rules—on sales performance, customer satisfaction, and customers' perceptions of salespeople's service delivery behaviors, namely, affective delivery, staff authenticity, and customer-focused organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Further, we investigate how role discretion and EDR interact to affect sales performance.

Reconciling Opposing Views: A Resource Allocation Perspective

Two theoretical approaches have been used to explain the effects of display rules on organizational outcomes: resource depletion (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998) and control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Goldberg and Grandey (2007), proponents of the former, suggested that efforts to conform to display rules drain personal resources (e.g., attentional, cognitive, self-regulatory) such that salespeople's performance is reduced. These authors found that the absence of organizationally endorsed display rules improved rather than diminished performance. Conversely, Diefendorff and Gosserand (2003) adopted a control theory perspective and conceptualized display rules as standards or goals that salespeople strive to attain in order to enhance performance; they suggested that display rules will be positively associated with valued organizational outcomes when the display rules are more rather than less detailed.

In order to reconcile these contradicting assumptions we draw on resource allocation theory (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989); according to this theory, performance depends on the distribution of cognitive and self-regulatory resources, which, in turn, are shaped by task characteristics. Specifically, Kanfer and Ackerman (1989) suggested that goals or tasks may activate self-regulatory activity rather than drain resources, and likewise, Kanfer, Ackerman, Murtha, Dugdale, and Nelson (1994) found that tasks may evoke anticipatory self-regulatory resources that improve performance. Conversely, self-regulatory activities may hinder performance when they demand increased attentional resources such that employees are unable to summon more effort and thus compromise their allocation of resources (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989; Kanfer et al., 1994). For example, Schmidt and Dolis (2009) suggested that when employees' available resources are insufficient they may reinterpret standards in order to do only the minimum required or find ways to abandon the task altogether. Similarly, when goals or standards are not communicated employees may not mobilize resources or may divert available resources toward insignificant tasks (Kluger, Lewinsohn, & Aiello, 1994). In short, choices on how to allocate resources depend on the strength of the demand or the "demandingness" of the task such that the higher the strength the more resources that are dedicated to the task (Kanfer & Stevenson, 1985, p. 681). Weak demands fail to mobilize resources and strong demands overtax resources. Applying this logic to display rules suggests that the relationship between EDR and performance will be curvilinear rather than monotonic, as we elaborate upon in the following section.

Explicitness of Display Rules

EDR may vary across organizations and range from the absence of prescription to the intense communication of requirements (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). EDR is independent of display rule content, which may include positive, neutral, or negative expressions (cf. Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal et al., 1964). Although norms pertaining to service jobs tend to involve positive expressions and behaviors toward customers (Hochschild, 1983), in the absence of explicit prescriptions, beliefs held by employees may be inconsistent, variable, and often self-serving (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

In line with theory on role sending (i.e., Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991; Katz & Kahn, 1978), EDR is essential in service organizations because the *sending* of sufficient information about display requirements motivates salespeople to activate resources in order to behave in ways that improve performance. Expectancy concerns and the need for mastery prompt salespeople to focus their effort on meeting set standards in order to successfully perform their role (Mukherjee & Malhotra, 2006). Thus, empirical findings have demonstrated that a lack of adequate information regarding role expectations is negatively related to performance (Tubre & Collins, 2000), and conversely, that a clear understanding of role requirements is positively associated with performance (Whitaker, Dahling, & Levy, 2007).

Findings from service organizations, however, suggest that the relationship between prescriptions and performance might not be quite so straightforward. Specifically, research has found various relationships between a lack of understanding of role requirements and performance. On one hand, Jackson and Schuler (1985) reported studies that found positive associations between employees' poor understanding of role expectations and performance in service organizations (e.g., Fulk & Wendler, 1982; Tosi, 1971). On the other hand, Berkowitz (1980) showed that salespeople's understanding of role requirements was not related to personal sales volume, and Singh (1993) found that role ambiguity on the part of sales personnel (i.e., salespeople, marketing and customer service staff) was also not related to performance.

In keeping with the above findings, Kahn and colleagues (1964) suggest that the relationship between organizational prescription and performance is likely not linear and that low or high levels of prescription would be dysfunctional. Scholars have similarly suggested that moderate rather than high or low levels of stimuli (e.g., time pressures, role demands, feelings of anxiety) facilitate the optimal allocation of available resources and consequently improve performance (i.e., Humphreys & Revelle, 1984; Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989).

EDR shapes resources at both the group and individual levels. Specifically, EDR may enhance or constrain group-level resources and influence each salesperson's perceptions of resource availability, guiding group and individual decisions regarding resource allocation. For example, Bacharach, Bamberger, and Doveh (2008) suggest that contextual factors may constrain group-level resources and, in turn, force employees to draw on their personal resources to achieve performance or shirk and withdraw. DeShon, Kozlowski, Schmidt, Milner, and Wiechmann (2004) also suggest that self-regulatory processes are isomorphic such that group and individual decisions regarding resource allocations follow the same theoretical mechanisms. Similarly, following resource allocation theory (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989), EDR may affect outcomes assessed by customers at the group level such as service delivery behaviors and individual-level outcomes such as sales performance (cf. Liao & Chuang, 2004).

Study 1

The Relationship of EDR with Affective Delivery

Affective delivery involves the expression of organizationally desirable emotions toward customers (Hochschild, 1983). For example, salespeople are often encouraged to be friendly, courteous, greet and thank customers, make eye contact and, in general, express positive emotions. These behaviors have been linked to customer satisfaction and re-patronage intentions, positive evaluations of service quality, and intentions to recommend the services to others (Brown & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994; Pugh 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002).

Affective delivery is effortful and requires the engagement of regulatory resources such that, at high EDR, the demands may exceed the regulatory capacity of the salespeople. In turn, perceptions that resources are insufficient may give rise to negative expectancies and cause cognitive and behavioral deterioration that trigger shirking or withdrawal (Carver & Scheier, 1981). At the other extreme—i.e., at low EDR—salespeople are afforded expressive latitude and they may have difficulty understanding the importance of their expressions to the organization (cf. Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003). As a result, they may fail to activate and direct resources toward regulating their expressions. Conversely, moderate EDR likely helps salespeople understand the significance of their demeanor for influencing the customer experience and prompts them to use resources toward self-regulation. In addition, moderate EDR is less likely to overwhelm salespeople's total resource capacity. In short:

Hypothesis 1: EDR will have an inverted U-shaped relationship with affective delivery.

The Relationship of EDR with Staff Authenticity

Staff authenticity reflects the extent to which customers perceive employees' behavior to be the result of choice and to be consistent across personnel of the same establishment with values, beliefs, and emotions embraced by the organization (cf. Carroll & Wheaton, 2009; Kahn, 1992; Schaefer & Pettijohn, 2006). Staff authenticity is what Klein and Kozlowski (2000) call a configural construct: It is formed through patterns of individual behavior and compilation processes such that even if each salesperson achieves psychological authenticity, salespeople as a group may not be perceived as authentic if one, or more salespersons, contradicts the organization's image. For example, if each Disneyland employee convincingly feigns the appropriate display as part of a show, as a whole the show-participating employees would be perceived as authentic because they upheld the Disneyland tradition. In short, staff authenticity in services is judged vis-a-vis the context for performance (cf. Carroll & Wheaton, 2009).

Customers prefer authenticity during exchanges (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005) and findings from service organizations suggest that authenticity is positively associated with performance (Schaefer & Pettijohn, 2006). Even though enhancing staff authenticity is a daunting undertaking for organizations, one way to do so appears to be through

EDR.

As noted, high EDR ties up available resources for self-regulation such that it may reduce salespeople's receptiveness to social cues during service encounters (cf. Ashforth & Fried, 1988). When salespeople are unable to summon enough resources for monitoring and evaluating both their own and customers' behavior they may become insensitive to the subtleties of social interactions and consequently their behavior may appear out of line with what's expected of the organization's salespeople—that is, inauthentic. Further, at low EDR salespeople may allocate resources to peripheral tasks such that the emphasis each salesperson places on self-regulation would vary across salespeople employed by the same store. Insofar as customers' perceptions of authenticity depend on the coherence of the image projected by employees (cf. Carroll & Wheaton, 2009), at low EDR salespeople may seem inauthentic by creating inconsistent impressions (across salespeople) regarding standards for service delivery and quality (cf. Bowen & Lawler, 1992). Moderate EDR, on the other hand, allows salespeople to self-regulate while using additional resources to monitor and evaluate customers' behavior in order to engage actively in interactions (cf. Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996). In short, salespeople's behavior would be partly choice-driven and thus perceived to be more authentic (cf. Schaefer & Pettijohn, 2006; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997); moreover, a baseline level of consistency across salespeople is maintained such that the salespeople would, as a collective, seem more authentic (cf. Carroll & Wheaton, 2009). Thus:

Hypothesis 2: EDR will have an inverted U-shaped relationship with staff authenticity.

The Relationship of EDR with Customer-focused OCB

Salespeople's behavior that is targeted toward customers and supports task functions but goes above and beyond formal requirements is referred to as customer-focused OCB

(Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005). It is a largely discretionary form of behavior and has been shown to relate positively to various performance indicators (e.g., sales, customer satisfaction, store profits; Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997; Schneider et al., 2005).

Bettencourt and colleagues (2001) suggested that prescriptions about how to behave toward customers may influence the extent to which employees engage in customer-focused OCB because such knowledge facilitates an understanding of the organization's social context related to task performance. These authors found that service providers' knowledge of interaction strategies was positively related to customer-focused OCB. However, in line with resource allocation theory, salespeople may be unable to engage in customer-focused OCB under conditions of high EDR as their available resources may be used for self-regulation. Likewise, given that at low EDR salespeople may not understand the importance of certain behaviors in influencing the customer experience, their willingness and ability to direct resources toward customer-focused OCB may be low (cf. Bettencourt et al., 2001). Conversely and as mentioned, moderate EDR is unlikely to overwhelm salespeople's resource capacity such that it facilitates engagement in citizenship behaviors; it allows for additional resources to be diverted toward monitoring and evaluating customers' preferences that, in turn, shape salespeople's citizenship behavior efforts (cf. Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996). Therefore:

Hypothesis 3: EDR will have an inverted-U shaped relationship with customer-focused OCB.

The Relationship of EDR with Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is concerned with customers' feelings about the service experience and is formed through conscious and subconscious assessments of the organization and the service (Krampf, Ueltschy, & d'Amico, 2003). As noted, given the absence of prescription at low EDR, salespeople may behave in ways that do not please customers. Conversely, at high EDR salespeople may concentrate their efforts on creating a positive experience for customers at the expense of other work tasks. Constraining salespeople's resources to making the customer feel good may have an adverse effect on their ability to offer reliable and efficient service and, in turn, undermine customer's assessments of the service experience. In contrast, moderate EDR enables salespeople to divert resources across tasks while being aware of what behaviors enhance valued organizational outcomes. Therefore, at moderate EDR customers are more likely to experience reliable and efficient service in addition to pleasing behaviors such that their evaluations of the service will be enhanced. In short:

Hypothesis 4: EDR will have an inverted-U shaped relationship with customer satisfaction.

Method

Sample

The sample was comprised of retail stores. The employees of the stores, which were located in the central shopping district of Singapore, were invited to participate in the study. Surveys were completed at home or during work breaks and were collected by research assistants during the week following the administration of the survey; each respondent received approximately $8 (U.S.) as a reward. The response rate for participating stores was 67%. The response rate for employees was approximately 85%.

Customer data were collected through intercept sampling (cf. Schneider et al., 2005) one month after the collection of store data; customers were intercepted while exiting the store and asked to rate store-level affective delivery, staff authenticity, and customer-focused OCB. A $4

(U.S.) shopping voucher was offered as a reward. Usable matched data were received from 382 employees (mean across stores = 4.15 and SD = 3.01; store size ranged from 2 – 17) and 396 customers (mean across stores = 4.30 and SD = 1.46; number of customers per store ranged from 2 – 9) for 92 stores.

Measures and Analytic Approach

EDR. To develop items that reflected EDR we conducted semi-structured interviews with 4 sales supervisors and 10 salespeople employed in South-East Asia. The interviewees indicated that their organization prescribed expectations regarding appropriate emotional expression and behavior using several methods. We used this information to develop 5 items listed in Table 1a[1]. We pilot-tested the EDR scale and assessed its dimensionality with a separate sample of 45 marketing and sales support staff members employed by the same organization. They were on average 27 years old (SD = 6.94), with an average organizational tenure of two years (SD = 1.51), and approximately 30% had a university degree. Women comprised 69% of the sample. The results of an exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction with varimax rotation revealed a single factor that explained 81% of the variance (α = .94).

We examined the construct validity of the EDR measure by assessing its relationship with theoretically related variables. Specifically, because EDR involves the communication of prescriptions regarding how salespeople should constructively interact and express themselves with customers, it should be positively associated with service climate (i.e., the organization's emphasis on providing good customer service; Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998). Conversely,

[1] Table 1a can be accessed through the website of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*: http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/apl/index.aspx [Note to reviewers: Table 1a is attached in a separate file]

because EDR reflects information about expressing appropriate emotions toward customers, it should negatively relate to work method ambiguity (i.e., uncertainty regarding work procedures; Breaugh & Colihan, 1994). Results provided support for the above relationships. That is, data from the pilot study indicated that EDR was positively related to service climate (r = .51, p < .05; measured with the 7-item global service climate scale of Schneider et al., 1998; α = .93), and negatively to work method ambiguity (r = -.50, p < .05; measured with the 3-item scale by Breaugh and Colihan, 1994; α = .89).

We assessed the discriminant validity of EDR by examining its relationship with theoretically unrelated variables. Given that EDR describes a dimension of the work context, we have little reason to expect that it would relate significantly to human capital. The data from the pilot study supported the discriminant validity of our measure; the associations of EDR with work experience (r = -.12, p > .05), education (r = .06, p > .05), age (r = .10, p > .05), and gender (r = .09, p > .05) were not significant.

Collectively the evidence provides support for the construct validity of the EDR measure: EDR had a single factor structure, correlated significantly and in expected directions with theoretically related but distinct constructs, and was not associated with theoretically unrelated constructs.

Salespeople rated EDR using the newly developed 5-item scale (1 = "strongly disagree," to 7 = "strongly agree"). The average and median $r_{wg(j)}$ was .90 and .95 respectively; ICC(1) was .12. The store effect was significant (F = 1.68, p < .05).

Dependent variables. Customers assessed *affective delivery*, providing responses (1 = "to a very small extent," to 5 = "to a great extent") on 7 items adapted from Pugh (2001) and Grandey (2003). A sample item is "Staff smiles at customers." Customers also rated *staff* *authenticity* on a 3-item scale (1 = "strongly disagree," to 5 = "strongly agree") adapted from Sheldon et al. (1997). A sample item is "The staff is authentic." Further, customers reported store-level *customer-focused OCB* using a 5-item scale (1 = "to a very small extent," to 5 = "to a great extent") developed by Bettencourt and Brown (1997). A sample item is "Staff voluntarily assists customers even if it means going beyond job requirements." *Customer satisfaction* was also assessed by customers using the 11-item scale developed by B. Schneider containing adapted customer perceptions items (Schneider et al., 1998).

Control variable. Given that *service climate* reflects the organization's emphasis on providing good service (Schneider et al., 1998), it was essential to show that EDR is associated with customer satisfaction and salespeople's service delivery behaviors over and above the service climate's potential effects. Thus, we controlled for service climate as reported by the salespeople on the 9-item scale (1 = "poor," to 5 = "excellent") by Schneider et al. (1998). The average and median $r_{wg(j)}$ was .96 and .98 respectively, ICC(1) was .14, and the store effect was significant ($F = 1.88$, $p < .05$).

Analytic approach. Because all the variables reside at the store level, ordinary-least-squares (OLS) regression was appropriate for testing the hypotheses. We controlled for inherent differences between stores' affective delivery, staff authenticity, customer-focused OCB, and customer satisfaction by using their standardized within-store scores in the analyses. We followed procedures set out by Aiken and West (1991) to examine the potential curvilinear effects of EDR on outcomes.

Results

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using IBM SPSS AMOS. Because data were reported by two different sources, we tested two models in order to assess both the factor structure of EDR and the discriminant and convergent validity of all the latent constructs that were reported by the same source. The first model (Model 1) included the variables reported by salespeople (i.e., EDR and service climate; *N* = 382), and the second model (Model 2) included the variables reported by customers (i.e., affective delivery, staff authenticity, customer-focused OCB, and customer satisfaction; *N* = 396). Tables 1a and 1b[2] present the fit indices, item loadings, factor correlations and the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for both the item loadings and factor correlations for the two models, respectively.

Model 1 had an acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 483.64$, $df = 76$, $p < .001$, CFI = .89, SRMR = .06, and Model 2 provided a good fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 903.82$, $df = 293$, $p < .001$, CFI = .93, SRMR = .05. In sum, the results indicated an acceptable fit to the data for the two models and the limits of the 95% confidence intervals around factor correlations did not reach unity, supporting the discriminant and convergent validity of the constructs.

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among the variables.

Insert Table 2 about here

Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis 1, which suggested that the relationship of EDR with affective delivery will be curvilinear, was supported. Specifically, the results presented in Table 3 show that the squared term of EDR was significantly related to affective delivery ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .05$). The EDR score at which affective delivery started to diminish—that is, the inflection point—was 5.03 on

[2] Table 1a and 1b can be accessed through the website of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*: http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/apl/index.aspx [Note to reviewers: Tables 1a-1c are attached in a separate file]

an EDR scale of 1 to 7.

The analyses showed that EDR had an inverted-U shaped relationship with staff authenticity, supporting Hypothesis 2. That is, as depicted in Table 3, the EDR squared term had a significant association with staff authenticity ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .05$). The EDR score at which staff authenticity started to diminish was 5.18.

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, the results presented in Table 3 show that the relationship between EDR and customer-focused OCB is curvilinear: EDR squared was significantly related to customer-focused OCB ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .05$). The inflection point was an EDR score of 5.02.

Contrary to Hypothesis 4, the findings did not provide support for a curvilinear relationship between EDR and customer satisfaction. Instead, as indicated in Table 3, the relationship between these variables was linear and positive ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$).

Insert Tables 3 and 4 about here

Discussion

This study provides an initial examination of the effects of EDR on salespeople's service delivery behaviors (i.e., affective delivery, staff authenticity, and customer-focused OCB) and customer satisfaction. The significant curvilinear relationship between EDR and affective delivery supported Hypothesis 1, suggesting that moderate levels of EDR are ideal for motivating salespeople to engage in organizationally desirable forms of expression toward customers. Consistent with resource allocation theory (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989), we argued that moderate EDR is less likely to give rise to negative expectancies or overwhelm salespeople's available resources, preventing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral overload.

In keeping with Hypothesis 2, EDR also had an inverted U-shaped relationship with customers' perceptions of staff authenticity. It seems that under conditions of moderate EDR, salespeople's behavior is construed as more authentic because it is, at least partly, choice-driven and consistent across salespeople of the same establishment (cf. Carroll & Wheaton, 2009; Schaefer & Pettijohn, 2006).

The results also supported Hypothesis 3, suggesting that customer-focused OCB was optimal at moderate EDR. In line with Bettencourt and colleagues (2001), moderate EDR facilitates an understanding of the job's social context, prompting salespeople to allocate additional resources toward pleasing the customer.

Discrediting Hypothesis 4, the results showed that the relationship between EDR and customer satisfaction was linear and positive. One explanation for this finding is that, following resource allocation theory (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989), EDR affects resources and will therefore have a curvilinear relationship with behaviors that utilize resources. Conversely, EDR may exhibit a monotonic relationship with customer evaluations or attitudes because they do not involve reporting salespeople's actual behaviors; rather, they are concerned with customers' feelings about the service experience and thus do not require resource mobilization. Analogously, Kluger et al. (1994) found that feedback had a linear effect on harm/benefit appraisals that do not involve the use of resources but had a curvilinear effect on the need for action appraisal, which reflects decisions regarding resource activation and allocation.

Study 2

The Relationship of EDR with Sales Performance

Considering the findings of Study 1, we suggest that sales performance will peak at moderate rather than high or low EDR. First, customers' perceptions of salespeople's affective delivery and authenticity are most favorable at moderate EDR and, as noted in the preceding sections, these variables have been found to associate positively with sales performance and re-patronage intentions (Schaefer & Pettijohn, 2006; Tsai & Huang, 2002). Second, salespeople engage in more customer-focused OCB at moderate levels of prescription such that sales performance is likely to be highest at moderate EDR (cf. George & Bettenhausen, 1990). Last, optimal allocation of resources is facilitated by moderate levels of EDR (cf. Humphreys & Revelle, 1984; Kanfer and Ackerman, 1989). Specifically, because salespeople's performance depends on social interactions that vary widely, both an understanding of which behaviors enhance valued organizational outcomes and an ability to divert resources across multiple simultaneous tasks are essential. Moderate EDR is less likely to exceed salespeople's resource capacity and thus enables them to actively enact their role by using additional resources where most needed, adjusting their behavior to customers' demands and preferences (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996). Therefore:

Hypothesis 5: EDR will have an inverted U-shaped relationship with sales performance.

The Relationship of Role Discretion with Sales Performance

Role discretion is the degree of choice an employee has in enacting the work (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991). In line with both the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and resource allocation theory (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989), role discretion constitutes a valuable resource that may enhance the resource capacity of salespeople, increase their ability to handle demands, and shape choices regarding resource availability and reallocation. Specifically, role discretion triggers a motivational process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) that may create additional resources and make them more available (Humphreys & Revelle, 1984).

Because customer preferences and behaviors often vary within and between service transactions, service roles are frequently complex and dynamic. Presuming that individuals have sufficient ability and inclination to enact functional service behaviors, role discretion allows flexibility in resource allocation during service delivery to address emergent issues (Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Thus, findings from service organizations indicate that discretion facilitates effective role behaviors and enhances performance: Latitude at work has been found to be positively related to satisfaction, work engagement, well-being, and performance (Johnson & Spector, 2007; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Spector, 1986; Steward, 2006). Hence:

Hypothesis 6: Role discretion will be positively related to sales performance.

The Joint Effects of EDR and Role Discretion on Sales Performance

Given that the amount of resources available and decisions regarding their allocation depend on both the level of EDR and the degree of discretion afforded to salespeople, we argue that EDR will interact with role discretion to affect sales performance. The job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) suggests that organizational prescriptions interact with role discretion to influence motivation and performance. In addition, consistent with resource allocation theory (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989), any increase in the amount of available resources due to improved perceptions of control over outcomes may lead to better performance when salespeople are aware of what behaviors are valued by the organization. In short, EDR contextualizes role discretion; that is, EDR facilitates salespeople’s understanding of how to use the additional resources created by role discretion in displays towards customers meant to increase sales performance. Therefore, at low EDR the uncertainty regarding which behaviors favor organizational outcomes undermines the effectiveness of the additional resources because decisions about resource allocations may be fraught with ambiguity and guided by self-serving motives (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Likewise, at high EDR, salespeople will tend to direct the resources created by role discretion toward the prescribed demands, neglecting to reallocate effort (cf. Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Conversely, at moderate EDR, salespeople can make informed decisions regarding how to distribute the resources produced by role discretion and, in turn, adequately attend to simultaneous tasks that are important for the achievement of valued organizational outcomes.

At low role discretion and low EDR, salespeople's resources will not only be limited but may also be futile, that is, they may be used on peripheral tasks and in ways that do not favor performance (cf. Katz & Kahn, 1978). Similarly, not gaining additional resources through role discretion constrains resource reallocation such that, at high EDR, the concentration of resources on prescriptions exacerbates the resource reallocation quandary. In contrast, salespeople under conditions of moderate EDR understand what is basically important for the organization and thus, even within the resource constraints created by low role discretion, they will be able to use extant resources and reallocate them in ways that favor organizational outcomes. Thus:

Hypothesis 7: EDR will interact with role discretion to affect sales performance such that sales performance will peak at moderate EDR and high role discretion.

Method

Sample

We collected data from 175 salespeople (79% response rate) in South-East Asia. The salespeople were allotted company time for the survey and completed the questionnaires on-site. Women comprised 53% of the sample. The average age was 32 years (SD = 6.51), and average organizational tenure was four years (SD = 3.61). Approximately 35% of the participants had a university degree.

Measures

Role discretion was measured with the 3-item job autonomy scale (1 = "strongly disagree," to 7 = "strongly agree") by Hackman and Oldham (1975); a sample item is "My job permits me to decide on my own how to go about doing the work."[3] The percentage of sales targets achieved for the two months following the administration of the survey was used to measure *sales performance*. This measure is market-adjusted and allows for meaningful comparisons across sales representatives (Joshi, Liao, & Jackson, 2006). Similar market size adjustments are common in studies of sales success (e.g., McManus & Brown, 1995; Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese, & Thoresen, 2004). To examine the associations of EDR and role discretion with sales performance it was important to control for variables that may affect sales. Because human capital may influence performance (Avolio, Waldman, & McDaniel, 1990), we measured and controlled for salespeople's work experience (i.e., the total number of years and months salespeople were employed in similar positions, including their current appointment) and education (i.e., educational level attained; responses ranged from 1 = "primary school diploma," to 5 = "university degree").

Analytic Approach

In order to provide information regarding estimates of effect sizes (i.e., significance tests for R^2 and ΔR^2), we used OLS modeling to test our hypotheses. We used the same analytic

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[3] We prefer the term "role discretion" to "job autonomy" because: (1) job-related theorizing focuses on the content of job characteristics whereas role-related theorizing focuses on how the content is communicated; and (2) jobs largely refer to physical job demands while roles focus mainly on the social sources of demands (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991). Given our focus on the interactional rather than the physical aspects of work, and given that EDR reflects the strength of the organization's efforts to communicate display rules, the use of the term role discretion is more consistent with our theorizing.

approach employed in Study 1 to perform CFA and hypothesis tests.

Results

CFA was conducted using IBM SPSS AMOS. The model examined included all the variables reported by salespeople (i.e., EDR and role discretion; N = 175). Table 1c[4] presents the fit indices, item loadings, factor correlations and the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for both the item loadings and factor correlations. The results provided support for the discriminant and convergent validity of the constructs. The model had a good fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 69.18$, $df = 19$, $p < .001$; CFI = .92, SRMR = .06.

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among the variables.

Hypothesis Tests

Results provided support for Hypothesis 5, which posited that sales performance will peak at moderate EDR. Table 4 shows that the squared term of EDR in Model 3 is significantly related to sales performance ($\beta = -1.37$, $p < .05$). The EDR score at which sales performance started to diminish was 4.88 on an EDR scale of 1 to 7.

Insert Table 4 about here

The results presented in Table 4 affirm Hypothesis 6, which posits a positive relationship between role discretion and sales performance. Specifically, Model 4 shows that role discretion has a significant and positive association with sales performance ($\beta = 2.57$, $p < .05$).

Hypothesis 7 suggested that role discretion will moderate the relationship between EDR

[4] Table 1c can be accessed through the website of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*: http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/apl/index.aspx [Note to reviewers: Table 1c is attached in a separate file]

and sales performance such that sales performance will peak at moderate EDR and high role discretion. The results provide support for this hypothesis. Model 5 in Table 4 shows that the interaction term EDR × role discretion was significantly related to sales performance ($\beta = -2.02$, $p < .05$). Further, the graph of the interaction effect illustrated in Figure 1 shows that sales performance peaks at moderate EDR and high role discretion.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Discussion

This study examined the effects of EDR on sales performance and extended the literature on the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) by investigating the joint effects of EDR and role discretion on sales performance.

In support of Hypothesis 5, the results revealed that sales performance peaked at moderate EDR. This suggests that the optimal allocation of resources is done at moderate levels of EDR, which is also where service delivery behaviors are most favorable. That is, at moderate EDR, salespeople are better able to attend to a number of simultaneous tasks and divert resources where attention is most needed for improving performance outcomes.

Consistent with Hypothesis 6, the relationship between role discretion and sales performance was linear and positive. In keeping with the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and resource allocation theory (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989), this finding suggests that role discretion expands the resource capacity of salespeople and enables existing resources to be allocated to tasks. In turn, salespeople gain flexibility in resource allocation and become able to handle more tasks.

Finally, the findings also showed that EDR and role discretion interacted to affect sales performance, providing support for Hypothesis 7. As expected, a closer inspection of the interaction pattern shown in Figure 1 suggests that sales performance peaked when EDR was at moderate levels and role discretion was high. It seems that moderate EDR helps salespeople understand the importance of requirements such that the additional resources created by role discretion are used in a manner that favors the organization.

General Discussion

Theoretical Implications

The results have several theoretical implications. First, as noted, this study extends theory on emotional labor by reconciling conflicting assumptions founded on resource depletion and control theories regarding the relationship between display rules and performance. The results support a resource allocation perspective (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Specifically, high and low EDR appear to hamper performance. On one hand, high EDR may overwhelm salespeople's resource capacity, preventing them from monitoring and evaluating customers' behaviors or attending to other tasks. On the other hand, low EDR may provide minimal direction for customer-focused behavior, such that salespeople fail to mobilize resources. In contrast, moderate EDR appears to facilitate the optimal allocation of available resources favoring performance outcomes; it may prompt the activation of resources by emphasizing the importance of salespeople's behavior toward customers, and may allow for additional resources to be diverted across pressing tasks.

Second, this study provides support for the untested premise of the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) regarding the joint effects of job demands and role discretion on performance outcomes. Specifically, the pattern of interaction in Figure 1 suggests that EDR contextualizes role discretion: At low EDR, the additional resources created by role discretion may become somewhat futile because there is uncertainty regarding which behaviors favor the organization; at moderate EDR, the conveyed information may infuse purpose into decisions regarding the allocation of newly created resources meant to contribute to valued outcomes; at high EDR, the additional resources granted by role discretion may be largely directed toward the prescribed demands, reducing salespeople's ability to divert resources where attention is most needed. These results also underscore the need to examine the joint effects of EDR and role discretion on individual and organizational outcomes.

Third, the findings contribute to resource allocation theory (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989) by suggesting that organizations may increase employees' resource capacity through affording them certain privileges such as increased discretion. In short, employees' resource capacity may be malleable such that human resources practices may improve or even constrain it. Research should further examine how managerial policies and practices impact this capacity and shape employees' judgments regarding resource activation and reallocation.

Last, this study identified explicit elements of the work role that reflect the organization's influence attempts, and measured actual role sending (EDR) and examined its effects on organizational outcomes. It provides evidence suggesting that these elements are an important part of work roles and that research on their effects is warranted.

Management Implications

Even though the sales context wherein our studies were conducted is unique in terms of its emphasis on generating profits, our samples of salespeople come from work contexts with different reward (i.e., wage vs. wage and commission) and motivational structures (i.e., absence vs. presence of sales quotas), which strengthens our confidence in the generalizability of our findings across organizations. Our studies have important implications for both non-profit and for-profit service organizations. First, they provide insights that are useful for organizations regarding how to shape customers' perceptions of staff authenticity. Maintaining consistency across salespeople regarding standards for service delivery while enhancing their responsiveness to customers appears to improve perceptions of staff authenticity. Thus, human resource specialists may want to avoid high or low levels of EDR and allow increased levels of discretion in order for the organization to be construed as more reliable, authentic, and trustworthy. One way to do so is to construct a management/organization communication rubric™[5] detailing the relative emphasis to be placed on various job requirements such that each is covered accordingly during personnel briefings, training sessions, and other communications (e.g., manuals). Having a communication rubric™ allows for aligning the messages conveyed to employees with the organization's marketing strategy and permits the assessment of management's communications with the service staff.

Second, our findings show that customer-focused OCB is optimal at moderate EDR, which means that salespeople maximize efforts to personalize service delivery not when they are left to their own devices but when they understand which behaviors are important for the organization. As noted, moderate EDR enhances salespeople's knowledge of the social context wherein staff and customers co-produce the service experience such that salespeople are more willing and able to customize service delivery. Thus, as mentioned, scholarly and practitioner attention ought to shift from whether organizational rules and requirements simply exist to what is actually communicated to employees and how intensely.

Limitations

[5] TM, Copyright 2014 by the first author of this manuscript.

Several limitations are inherent in our work. First, EDR and role discretion were measured via self-report at a single point in time, raising concerns about common method variance. However, the results for the measurement model indicate that respondents were able to differentiate between these variables. Moreover, the findings pertaining to the outcome variables of customer satisfaction and service delivery behaviors were customer reports collected one month after the salespeople's responses. Likewise, sales performance was comprised of an objective measure targeted at the two months following the survey.

Second, because we measured sales performance as the percentage of sales revenue generated over salespeople's revenue targets, expected performance confounds actual performance.[6] Scholars may wish to replicate our findings by studying the effects of EDR in contexts where the decoupling of expected and actual performance is possible.

Third, our theorizing drew partly on the concept of "role discretion" but our corresponding measure references the word "job." Although we believe that substituting the said word with "role" is unlikely to have affected the results, future research should replicate our findings using adapted items.

Last, although we argued that EDR affects salespeople's expectancies and that the interaction of EDR and role discretion shapes salespeople's resource capacity, we did not actually measure salespeople's resources or expectancies. Research should strive to measure these variables and examine their associations with EDR.

Conclusion

[6] We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

In closing, our study sheds light on the relationships of display rules with service delivery behaviors and sales performance; specifically, it reconciles conflicting assumptions regarding either a positive or a negative relationship between display rules and performance. Valued organizational outcomes were maximized when explicitness was moderate and role discretion was high, affirming Kahn and colleagues' (1964) contention that the strength with which organizations communicate prescriptions "is the major basis for their effectiveness" (p. 16).

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Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Study 1								
1. EDR	4.88	.75	(.91)					
2. Affective delivery	3.91	.38	.07	(.83)				
3. Staff authenticity	3.88	.39	.05	.58**	(.61)			
4. Customer-focused OCB	3.58	.50	.12	.56**	.57**	(.93)		
5. Service climate	3.45	.46	.56**	.02	-.06	.14	(.92)	
6. Customer satisfaction	3.38	.54	.22*	.18	.46**	.45**	.21*	(.98)
Study 2								
1. EDR	4.86	1.22	(.89)					
2. Role discretion	5.08	1.02	.25**	(.62)				
3. Sales performance	94.12	16.48	.01	.18*	_			
4. Work experience	8.85	6.39	.01	.03	.29**	_		
5. Education	3.61	1.16	-.11	.08	.13	-.20*	_	

Note. Study 1: N = 175. Study 2: N = 92. Internal consistency reliabilities appear in parentheses. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 3

The Relationships of EDR with Affective Delivery, Staff Authenticity, Customer-focused OCB, and Customer Satisfaction

Variable	Affective delivery			Staff authenticity			Customer-focused OCB			Customer satisfaction		
	M.1	*M.2*		*M.1*	*M.2*		*M.1*	*M.2*		*M.1*		*M.2*
			95% CI			*95% CI*			*95% CI*		*95% CI*	
Service climate	-.08	-.07	(-.53, .36)	-.28	-.27	(-.88, .30)	.23	.23	(-.24, .70)	.26*	(.12, .59)	.26*
EDR	.12	.14	(-.15, .44)	.16	.17	(-.18, .52)	.08	.10	(-.21, .39)	.20*	(.08, .47)	.20*
EDR^2		-.35*	(-.61, -.20)		-.21*	(-.46, -.07)		-.27*	(-.52, -.11)			-.04
R^2	.01	.09*		.01	.04*		.02	.07*			.06*	.06*
ΔR^2		.08*			.03*			.05*				_

Note. N = 92. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Standardized within store affective delivery, staff authenticity, customer-focused OCB, and customer satisfaction scores were used in the analyses. Percentile confidence intervals (CI) are based on 7,000 bootstrap resamples. "*M*." denotes "Model." $*p < .05$.

Table 4
The Relationships of EDR and Role Discretion with Sales Performance

Variable	Sales performance							
	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*		*Model 4*		*Model 5*	
				95% CI		*95% CI*		*95% CI*
Work experience	.87*	.87*	.92*	(.59, 1.30)	.85*	(.54, 1.21)	.86*	(.43, 1.26)
Education	2.68*	2.74*	2.61*	(.93, 4.33)	2.47*	(.79, 4.19)	2.28*	(.63, 4.08)
EDR		.49	.04	(-1.67, 1.62)			-.31	(-2.18, 1.33)
Role discretion					2.57*	(.93. 4.17)	3.94*	(1.17, 6.73)
EDR^2			-1.37*	(-2.88, -.06)			-1.18	(-2.68, .17)
EDR × Role discretion							-2.02*	(-3.96, -.28)
EDR^2 × Role discretion							-1.24	(-2.72, .11)
R^2	.12*	.12*	.14*		.14*		.18*	
ΔR^2 relative to Model 1		.00	.02*		.02*		.06*	
ΔR^2 relative to Model 2			.02*					

Note. *N* = 175. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Percentile confidence intervals (CI) are based on 7,000 bootstrap resamples. **p* ≤.05.

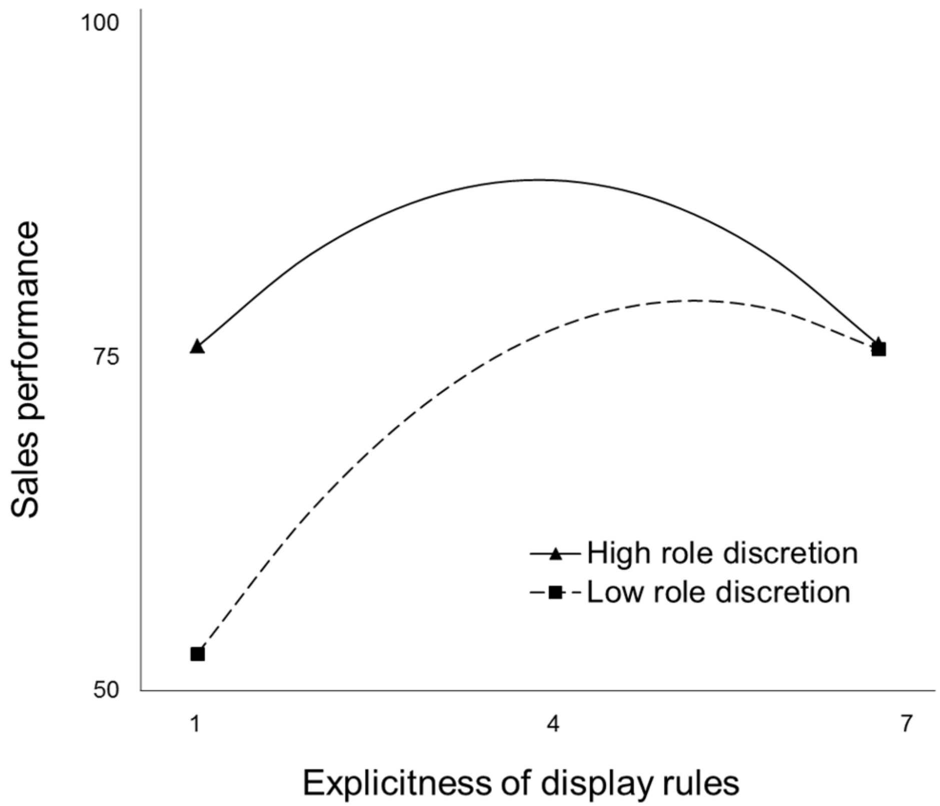

Figure 1
The relationship between explicitness of display rules and sales performance for high and low role discretion.