The concept of customer orientation in salespeople is defined, a scale is developed to measure the degree to which salespeople engage in customer-oriented selling, and the properties of the scale are reported. A test of the nomological validity indicates the use of customer-oriented selling is related to the ability of the salespeople to help their customers and the quality of the customer-salesperson relationship.

**The SOCO Scale: A Measure of the Customer Orientation of Salespeople**

More than 50 years ago, Strong (1925) emphasized that personal selling strategies should be directed toward securing customer satisfaction as well as purchase orders. Despite numerous references to the benefits of customer-oriented sales behaviors since that time, little empirical research has examined the effectiveness of customer-oriented selling and the factors influencing the extent to which salespeople engage in it. The objective of our study is to facilitate such research by developing a measure of the degree to which a salesperson engages in customer-oriented selling.

With a measure of customer-oriented selling, the relationship between this selling behavior and sales effectiveness can be investigated. Is customer-oriented selling universally effective, or does its effectiveness depend on the nature of the sales situation? In addition, researchers can explore the effects of company policies on the customer orientation of salespeople. Are salaried salespeople more customer oriented than commissioned salespeople? Do direct salespeople use customer-oriented selling more than manufacturers’ agents?

We first describe customer-oriented sales behaviors, then develop a measure of customer orientation. After describing the procedure used to develop the measure and the properties of the measure, we examine the relationships among customer-oriented selling, characteristics of the sales situation, and salesperson performance.

**DEFINITION OF CUSTOMER-ORIENTED SELLING**

Customer-oriented selling can be viewed as the practice of the marketing concept at the level of the individual salesperson and customer. The marketing concept, a cornerstone of marketing thought for the last 30 years, calls for an integrated, companywide approach in which all of the firm’s activities are directed toward providing customer satisfaction and establishing mutually beneficial, long-term relationships with its market (Kotler 1980). Kurtz, Dodge, and Klompmaker (1976) have explicitly related the marketing concept to the behavior of salespeople.

In the marketing concept, all parts of an organization are oriented toward solving customer problems and meeting the needs of the marketplace. Sales personnel no longer specialize solely in increasing sales volume; rather, the prospect’s real needs become the basis of the marketing plan. . . . Companywide acceptance of a consumer orientation requires the sales force to become thoroughly professional in its dealings with prospects and customers. A mark of professionalism in sales is that sellers adopt a problem-solving approach to their work. A professional salesperson does not wonder, “What can I sell this individual?” but instead asks, “How can I best solve this person’s problems?” (p. 13, 14).

Though adoption of the marketing concept is far from universal (Kotler 1980; McNamara 1972), Rieser (1962) has reported a trend in industrial selling toward a problem-solution approach and away from approaches based on camaraderie and/or pressure.

The marketing concept requires an organization to determine the needs of a target market and adapt itself to satisfying those needs better than its competitors. The organization seeks to generate customer satisfaction as
the key to satisfying its goals. Under the selling concept, in contrast, an organization seeks to stimulate demand for products it produces, rather than producing products in response to customer needs.

Customer-oriented selling is a way of doing business on the part of salespeople. The term refers to the degree to which salespeople practice the marketing concept by trying to help their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy customer needs. Highly customer-oriented salespeople engage in behaviors aimed at increasing long-term customer satisfaction. In addition, they avoid behaviors which might result in customer dissatisfaction. Thus highly customer-oriented salespeople avoid actions which sacrifice customer interest to increase the probability of making an immediate sale. The selling concept in a company corresponds to a low level of customer orientation in a salesperson.

Selling approaches similar to high customer orientation have been proposed in the literature. Several writers have suggested interpersonal behavior models incorporating two dimensions—concern for self and concern for others (Blake and Mouton 1970; Buzzotta, Lefton, and Sherberg 1972; Thomas 1976). Within the context of these models, customer orientation is related to the "concern for others" dimension. High customer orientation is most closely associated with high concern for others/high concern for self, whereas low customer orientation is most closely associated with low concern for others/high concern for self. Customer orientation also incorporates low pressure selling (Bursk 1947) and need satisfaction/problem solution selling approaches (Gwinner 1968).

A CUSTOMER-ORIENTATION SCALE

Scale Development

The procedure used to develop a measure of customer-oriented selling, illustrated in Figure 1, largely follows the guidelines recommended by Nunnally (1978) and Churchill (1979).

Figure 1
STEPS IN DEVELOPING A CUSTOMER-ORIENTATION SCALE

DEFINITION OF CUSTOMER-ORIENTED SELLING

DEVELOPMENT OF AN ITEM POOL
- REVIEW OF LITERATURE
- INTERVIEWS WITH SALES MANAGERS

ASSESSMENT OF CONTENT VALIDITY OF ITEMS BY EXPERT JUDGES

FIRST SURVEY OF SALESPEOPLE TO SELECT BEST ITEMS

SECOND SURVEY OF SALESPEOPLE TO ASSESS SCALE PROPERTIES AND TEST CONTINGENCY HYPOTHESES

READMINISTRATION OF SCALE TO PART OF SECOND SAMPLE TO ASSESS TEST RELIABILITY

Initial definition and development of item pool. The literature was surveyed and the concept of customer orientation was investigated further by interviewing 25 salespeople and sales managers. In many of these interviews, the salespeople and managers were asked to describe attitudes and behaviors that distinguished high and low customer-oriented salespeople. Largely on the basis of the literature review and interviews, customer-oriented selling was initially characterized as follows.

1. A desire to help customers make satisfactory purchase decisions.
2. Helping customers assess their needs.
3. Offering products that will satisfy those needs.
5. Adapting sales presentations to match customer interests.
6. Avoiding deceptive or manipulative influence tactics.
7. Avoiding the use of high pressure.

In some interviews, the fifth characteristic was rejected on the basis that salespeople with both low and high customer orientation will adapt sales presentations to customer interests. This viewpoint was later supported by the data in the first survey of salespeople. Some sales managers also argued that a highly customer-oriented salesperson would often use high pressure and manipulation to persuade a reluctant customer to purchase a product the salesperson knew would be a beneficial purchase for the customer. However, this position was not supported by the data.

Using the literature on the marketing concept, interpersonal behavior models, and the 25 interviews, we generated a pool of 104 items. These items represented each of the seven categories listed and included both positively and negatively stated items to control for the possibility of acquiescence bias (Cronbach 1946).

Survey of expert judges. Expert judges (11 sales managers and 13 marketing academics) were then surveyed. After the concept of customer-oriented selling was described, each judge was asked to classify the 104 items into the following three categories: (1) "clearly representative," (2) "somewhat representative," and (3) "not representative" of customer-oriented selling.1 Seven judges rated the items, and the responses from one judge (a sales manager) were discarded because he did not make the appropriate responses to the irrelevant items.
enty items consistently classified as "clearly representative" items were retained in the item pool.2

First survey of salespeople. The 70 items were sent to a convenience sample of salespeople. The sample was chosen so that a wide variety of selling jobs would be represented. The jobs represented by more than 10 respondents were retail vehicle sales, wholesale food sales, retail clothing sales, industrial packaging sales, and retail salesclerks. The largest group, with 24 respondents, was retail motor vehicle salespeople.

These salespeople were asked to indicate the proportion of their customers with whom they acted in the manner described in an item, using a seven-point scale anchored by "always" and "never." Four hundred seventy questionnaires were distributed to salespeople in 48 firms. Two hundred and eight were returned for a response rate of 44%. Seventeen of the respondents were dropped because they failed to answer three or more items.

To check for the possibility of social desirability bias, the respondents also completed the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne and Marlowe 1964). Each item was correlated with the social desirability score, as suggested by Nunnally (1978, p. 298). The fact that all correlations are small and insignificant indicates that the items are not contaminated by a social desirability factor. Any upward biasing is apparently unrelated to individual differences in need for approval.

Item selection. The negatively stated items were reverse-scored and a total score was computed for each respondent. Corrected item-total correlations were computed for each item. The 12 positively stated and the 12 negatively stated items with the highest corrected item-total correlations were chosen for the scale. The use of equal numbers of both types of items is recommended by McKelvey (1976). The items forming the scale are listed in Table

### Table 1
SOCO (SELLING ORIENTATION—CUSTOMER ORIENTATION) SCALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item number</th>
<th>Corrected r</th>
<th>Judges’ rating (%)</th>
<th>Loading on Factor 1</th>
<th>Loading on Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.40</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1All retained items were rated "clearly representative" by at least 50% of the judges. Some items were reworded on the basis of comments made by the judges.
Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Corrected rating (a)</th>
<th>Judges' rating (%)b</th>
<th>Loading on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Factor 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stem—negatively stated items</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>.57</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>.61</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.52</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.50</td>
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<td>.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>.49</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) “Corrected r” refers to the corrected item-to-total Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The correction removes the effects of the item in question from the total score.

(b) The “judges’ rating” refers to the percentage of judges (from the survey of 23 experts) who rated an item as “clearly representative” of the concept of customer orientation rather than “somewhat representative” or “not representative.” Three items were not rated by the judges, and have no rating indicated.

1. The 12 positively stated items are given first in descending order of item-total correlations, followed by the 12 negatively stated items. The scale is called SOCO, for Selling Orientation—Customer Orientation.

Second survey of salespeople. Four salesforces participated in a second survey: a company selling electronic components to manufacturers and distributors, a dealer selling motor vehicles to the public, and two salesforces from a company selling computer services to a variety of business and government organizations. One of these computer service salesforces, referred to as new business reps, made the initial sale of the service, and the other, referred to as maintenance reps, handled the continuing sales relationship and made follow-on sales.

Surveys were distributed to 133 salespeople and 95 usable responses were returned for a response rate of 71%. Each subject completed a questionnaire containing the SOCO scale, the MACH IV scale (Christie and Geis 1970), demographic information, and 18 questions intended to measure situational variables used to examine the nomological validity of the scale.

Properties of the SOCO Scale

Reliability. Coefficient alpha (Cronbach 1951) for the SOCO scale for the first sample of salespeople was .86, indicating that the scale has a high level of internal consistency, an important indication of reliability (Peter 1979). An administration of the 24-item SOCO scale to the second sample resulted in an alpha of .83.

Test-retest reliability was measured to assess the stability of the scale over time. After a six-week interval, 46 salespeople in the second sample were retested and a correlation of .67 (p < .001, one-tailed) indicated a moderate degree of stability.

Factor structure. A principal axes factor analysis, with squared multiple correlations in the diagonal, was performed on the responses from the first sample. The breaks-in-eigenvalues criterion indicated a two-factor structure. One factor, accounting for 53% of the variance, was a general factor representing customer orientation. All items had a moderate positive correlation with this factor; 271 of 276 correlations between items were in the expected direction and most were significant. The second factor, accounting for 20% of the variance, separated the positively stated items from the negatively stated items. Such factors are commonly found in factor analyses of scales consisting of both positive and negative items (e.g., Christie and Geis 1970, p. 361–87; Robinson and Shaver 1973, p. 727–32; Welsh 1956).4

4 This second factor may be a “difficulty factor” (Digman 1966; Gorsuch 1974; Guilford 1941). This term is derived from achievement and aptitude testing in which exceptionally difficult items, that can...
Distributional properties. The distribution of SOCO scores from the first sample of salespeople is shown in Figure 2. The responses to the individual items (after reflection of the negative items) indicated a high level of customer orientation. When converted to the nine-point scale used in the final instrument, the mean score was 183 and the standard deviation was 24. The scores on SOCO are skewed, with most scores concentrated on the high end of distribution. The skewness of the first scores for the first sample was $-1.33$.

To reduce the skewness of scale, the version used with the second sample and in the final instrument incorporated a nine-point rather than a seven-point scale. This change may have succeeded in reducing the skewness, because the skewness of the second set of responses was $-0.88$. However, the second sample also contained fewer low customer-oriented sales groups, which would also lead to lower skewness. The mean score for the second sample was 186 and the standard deviation was 18.

Item content. The original conception of the components of customer orientation was largely supported by the data. Of the seven categories of items, only one, matching sales presentations to customer interests, was not represented on the scale. The key concept, exemplified by the items with the highest corrected item-total correlations, seems to be that a highly customer-oriented salesperson will not sacrifice the customer's best interests to make a sale. This finding is not surprising, because the severest test of customer orientation is faced when salespeople must make a choice between their customers' satisfaction and their own short-term self-interest in closing each sale.

Content validity. Content validity is not assessed by statistical means; rather it is sought through the use of a representative collection of items and a sensible method of test construction (Nunnally 1978). The use of a broad and representative range of items and a standard method of item selection provides a scale with adequate content validity. The items were rated very highly by expert judges (Table 1). On average, 79% of the judges called an item "clearly representative" of the concept of customer orientation.

Convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent and discriminant validity were examined using data collected in the second sample of salespeople. The SOCO scale correlated ($r = .56, p < .001$) with a measure of long-term versus short-term time orientation developed in this study (Saxe 1979). SOCO scores correlated negatively ($r = -.47, p < .001$) with the personality trait of Machiavellianism, assessed by the MACH IV scale (Christie and Geis 1970). Machiavellianism measures, among other things, a willingness to engage in manipulative behaviors. The lack of correlations with the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale ($r = .00$) shows evidence of discriminant validity.

Known group validity. SOCO scores for groups of salespeople are reported in Table 2. These scores reflect the expected pattern of results. Industrial salespeople with much repeat business scored higher than retail salespeople with less repeat business. Salesclerks scored significantly lower than either a group of computer time salespeople or a group of electronics components salespeople. A group of auto salespeople from a dealer using a "takeover" system (in which a customer is turned over to a "closer") also had significantly lower scores than auto salespeople associated with an agency that does not use a "takeover" system.

The convergent, discriminant, and known group validity discussed in this section are all forms of construct validity. Additional evidence of construct validity is provided by examining the relationship between the SOCO...
measure and other variables conceptually related to the use of customer-oriented selling. In the next sections, the nomological validity of the SOCO scale is demonstrated.

CUSTOMER-ORIENTED SELLING, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SALES SITUATION, AND SALESPERSON PERFORMANCE

In this section, the relationships among the use of customer-oriented selling, characteristics of the sales situation, and salesperson performance are investigated. After developing hypotheses about the effectiveness of customer-oriented selling, we report empirical results.

Characteristics of the Sales Situation and Customer-Oriented Selling

Though salespeople can realize long-term benefit by using customer-oriented selling, they also incur costs when using this selling approach. An opportunity cost arises when short-term sales are sacrificed to maintain customer satisfaction and increase the probability of future sales. Clearly, in some situations the impact of an immediate sale outweighs the potential impact of future sales. In addition, salespeople practicing a customer-oriented approach must spend time collecting information about customer needs and demonstrating how their products satisfy those needs. The time spent engaging in these activities might be spent more productively on attempting to persuade the customer or in calling on other customers.

One would expect that a customer-oriented approach would be used when the benefits outweigh the costs. Such conditions are likely in the following circumstances.

1. The salesperson can offer a range of alternatives and has the expertise to determine which alternatives will satisfy customer needs.
2. The salesperson's customers are typically engaged in complex buying tasks.
3. The salesperson typically has a cooperative relationship with his or her customers.
4. Repeat sales and referrals are an important source of business for the salesperson.

Customer-oriented selling is cost effective when salespeople have the resources needed to tailor their offerings to customer needs. Examples of such resources are the ability of salespeople to analyze customer problems and the availability of a broad range of products that can be offered as solutions.

In addition, customers are most receptive to a customer-oriented approach when they need assistance to solve a new/complex problem and when they have a close, trusting relationship with salespeople. Such situations are conducive to a free flow of information. Salespeople are able to determine customer needs and feel that their suggestions will be considered.

Finally, the benefits of a customer-oriented approach will justify the costs when the salesperson can expect to contact the customer in the future. In such a situation, the satisfied customer can reward the salesperson by continuing to place orders. Salespeople can use information collected during subsequent interactions and thus reduce their sales "cost" per sale. In these conditions, customer-oriented selling is likely to increase satisfaction, which is then likely to increase salesperson performance.

Relationship Between SOCO and Characteristics of Sales Situation

The typical sales situations encountered by the salespeople in the second sample were assessed by means of 18 questions. The correlations between the SOCO scores of the salespeople and these questions reflecting their perception of their typical sales situation are shown in Table 3. The correlations support most of the relationships anticipated between customer-oriented selling and characteristics of sales situation described in the preceding section. Salespeople with a product line matching customer needs, the time to investigate and satisfy customer needs, and the support of their company have higher SOCO scores. The customer orientation of salespeople is related positively to the extent to which customers use the salespeople as an information source, cooperate with salespeople in identifying needs, and trust salespeople. There is a negative relationship between customer orientation and salespeople's perception of a conflict of interest with their customers. Though the SOCO scale is related to the degree to which salespeople sell to customers who purchase frequently, it is not related to whether satisfied customers will buy again or the level of repeat sales.

To develop more reliable, multi-item measures of sales situations, the 18 items characterizing sales situation were factor analyzed. A principal components analysis revealed two factors, based on the breaks in eigenvalues. The components accounted for 31% of the variance in the data. The varimax rotated loadings of the items are shown in Table 3.

The first factor, referred to as RELATIONS, indicates the degree to which the customer-salesperson relationship is long-term and cooperative. Items with high loadings (greater than .40) on the first factor assess the importance of repeat business to the salesperson (16, 17, 18), the likelihood of follow-on orders from satisfied customers (5), and the emphasis on producing long-term versus immediate results (8). Additional items with loadings over .40 measure the quality of the customer-salesperson relationship in terms of cooperation (2), trust (3), lack of conflict (9), and the amount of pressure expected (13).

The second factor, ABILITY TO HELP, indicates the ability of salespeople to help their customers satisfy their needs. Items loading on this factor measure the degree to which salespeople see themselves as able to help customers (6), the degree to which the salesperson's prod-
### Table 3
**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCO SCORES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SALES SITUATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Correlation with SOCO</th>
<th>Loadings Factor 1 ABILITY TO HELP</th>
<th>Loadings Factor 2 RELATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.a</td>
<td>.17&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.a</td>
<td>.18&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.a</td>
<td>.27&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.a</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.a</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.a</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.a</td>
<td>.17&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.a</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.54</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.a</td>
<td>-.24&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-.56</td>
<td>-.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.a</td>
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<td>11.b</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.c</td>
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<td>-.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.c</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Salesperson indicated the extent to which the item applied to his/her typical sales situation on a seven-point scale anchored by "minimum extent" and "maximum extent."<br><sup>b</sup>Salesperson indicated agreement with the item on seven-point scale anchored by "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree."<br><sup>c</sup>Salesperson responded to question by filling in a number.<br><sup>d</sup>p < .10, N = 97.<br><sup>e</sup>p < .05, N = 97.<br><sup>f</sup>p < .01, N = 97.

Products match customer needs (7), the willingness of customers to spend sufficient time with salesperson (10), the importance of nonprice factors in the customer's purchase decision (11), and the support received by the salespeople from their companies (14). Presumably a good relationship with customers is needed to find their needs and help them, and several customer-salesperson relationship items (2, 3, 9) load on both factors. Only the large negative loading of percentage of repeat business (16) departs from the identification of the second factor as measuring the salesperson's perception of his or her ability to help customers. This discrepancy is probably an artifact caused by new business reps and vehicle salespeople, who see themselves as able to help customers substantially and have much less repeat business than the other two groups.

The salesperson's perceptions of both his or her relationship with customers (assessed by the RELATIONS factor score) and ability to help customers (assessed by the ABILITY TO HELP factor score) are significantly related to the practice of customer-oriented selling (assessed by the SOCO score). In a multiple regression of SOCO on RELATIONS and ABILITY TO HELP, both factors were significant, at the .01 and .05 levels, respectively. The multiple correlation of the model was .36.
This relationship between SOCO and the two situational factors may be biased because of common method variance. Both the SOCO measure of sales behavior and the measures of the nature of the sales situation are based on self-reports obtained from salespeople. In addition, the causality of these relationships is unclear because of the correlational design. Customer-oriented selling may result in high RELATIONS, rather than high RELATIONS stimulating customer-oriented selling.

**SOCO and Sales Performance**

The relationship between SOCO and performance across sales situations provides the strongest evidence of nomological validity. The sales managers of the participating companies provided performance data for the respondents. For the electronic components salesforce, performance was measured by the total sales volume in the most recent fiscal year and by the national sales manager's ranking of the salespeople in terms of their overall value to the organization. For the motor vehicle salesforce, total earnings and number of vehicles sold in the preceding 11 months were used. For the two computer services salesforces, dollar volume of orders and percentage of quota achieved in the preceding 11 months were used.

Because the measures were highly correlated within each salesforce, the performance data for each salesforce were reduced to a single standardized score for each salesperson by performing a principal components analysis on the performance measures available for the salesforce and extracting a factor score. The proportion of variance accounted for ranged from 74% and 99% in the four groups. The shapes of the distributions of performance scores were roughly the same in all four salesforces, so the use of standardized factor scores allowed the performance scores to be pooled in subsequent analyses. Thus the hypothesis could be tested even though subjects were analyzed as a single group and not as separate salesforces. However, it is not absolute performance that is measured when such a procedure is employed, but the closely related concept of performance in relation to the rest of the firm's own salesforce. In addition, this measure only examines sales performance over a relatively short period, one year, and may not capture effects on long-term sales performance due to customer satisfaction realized when customer-oriented selling is used.

The measure, however, produces a conservative test of the hypothesis because it suggests that the mean salesperson performance in each salesforce was the same. Thus a portion of the variance in sales performance due to differences in mean performance levels across salesforces may not be accounted for by the independent variable—the SOCO measure.

From the preceding discussion, one would expect the use of a customer-oriented approach to be most effective when the sales conditions favor such an approach—when RELATIONS and ABILITY TO HELP are high. To examine this hypothesis, four groups were formed by dividing the second sample of salespeople at the median scores on the two factors. Then the correlation between the SOCO score and the performance of the salesperson was calculated for each group.

The results of this analysis, reported in Table 4, support this hypothesis. The correlation between customer orientation and performance is positive and significant for salespeople in the high ABILITY TO HELP/high RELATIONS group (r = .40, p < .05, one-tail). This is the highest positive correlation, as expected. The correlations in the three other groups are insignificant or negative. The customer orientation/performance correlation in the high ABILITY TO HELP/high RELATIONS group is significantly greater than the correlations in the high ABILITY TO HELP/low RELATIONS group (z = 1.30, p < .10, one-tail), the low ABILITY TO HELP/high RELATIONS group (z = 3.10, p < .01, one-tail), and the low ABILITY TO HELP/low RELATIONS group (z = 1.90, p < .05, one-tail).

The only unanticipated finding is that the lowest (most negative) correlation between customer orientation and performance is in the low ABILITY TO HELP/high RELATIONS group rather than in the group low on both characteristics.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELATIONS factor score</th>
<th>Above median</th>
<th>Below median</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABILITY TO HELP factor score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above median</td>
<td>.40* (23)</td>
<td>.02 (26)</td>
<td>.16 (49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below median</td>
<td>-.43* (24)</td>
<td>-.19 (22)</td>
<td>-.26 (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>-.09 (47)</td>
<td>-.06 (48)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, one-tail.

*Interpretation: the correlation between SOCO and the standardized measure of sales performance was .40 for the 23 salespeople whose factor scores were above the median on RELATIONS and ABILITY TO HELP.

*Interpretation: the correlation between SOCO and the standardized measure of sales performance was .16 for the 40 salespeople whose factor score on ABILITY TO HELP was above the median.
DISCUSSION

A 24-item paper-and-pencil scale (SOCO) was developed to measure customer orientation in salespeople. The reliability and validity of the measure were demonstrated. However, additional research is needed to further validate the scale. A study of the relationship of customer orientation and customer satisfaction should be useful in this regard. In addition, the relationship of customer orientation and existing measures of "other" orientation such as inner-outer directedness (Kassarjian 1962) and self-monitoring (Synder 1976) should be examined. Finally, norms need to be established for the scale across a wide range of salespeople engaged in different sales situations.

Though the significance of the anticipated relationships between SOCO scores and characteristics of the sales situation demonstrate the nomological validity of the SOCO measure, the results are not strong. The nature of the salesforces and reliability of sales situation measures contributed to reducing the strength of the relationships uncovered.

The two situational factors (quality of salesperson-customer relations and ability to help) accounted for only 31% of variance in the 18 items measuring situational characteristics. Only four of the items loaded more than 0.60 on a factor, the highest loading being -0.68.

Problems in measuring sales situations encountered in our study emphasize the need to develop a taxonomy of sales situations with reliable measures validated against observation, archival data, and the ratings of sales managers, customers, and salespeople. The results of this study and the Spiro and Perreault (1979) study should be helpful in identifying aspects of the sales situations related to selling approaches. Reliable measures of sales situations will facilitate the investigation of relationships between the effectiveness of selling approaches (such as customer orientation) and the nature of sales situations (Weitz 1981). Though measures of sales situations are needed to investigate thoroughly the sales effectiveness of customer-oriented selling, the results of our study suggest that the SOCO measure can be used to examine the impact of company policy on sales behaviors at this time.

REFERENCES

——— (1951), "Coefficient Alpha and the Internal Structure of Tests, Psychometrika, 16 (October), 297-334.