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HEC MONTRÉAL
École affiliée à l'Université de Montréal

**Salespeople's Passion, Creativity, and Their Impact on Sales
Performance:
Investigating Antecedents and Relationships in a Two-Essay
Dissertation**

**par
Simon Boissonneault**

Thèse présentée en vue de l'obtention du grade de Ph. D. en administration
(option Marketing)

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Dissertation**

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Résumé

La thèse explore les dynamiques complexes des environnements de vente au détail en intégrant la théorie de l'échange social avec les théories liées à la passion et à la créativité pour décrire les relations conceptuelles. S'appuyant sur deux études, l'auteur examine comment les caractéristiques des vendeurs et des gestionnaires influent sur le processus séquentiel impliquant la passion harmonieuse, la créativité, les comportements de vente basés sur la valeur et la performance des ventes. Plusieurs relations clés sont explorées à partir des données de 252 et 271 dyades gestionnaire-vendeur au sein d'une chaîne de matériel d'artiste. Les résultats de la première étude démontrent que la passion harmonieuse influence positivement la créativité, stimulant ainsi les comportements de vente basés sur la valeur et, par conséquent, la performance des ventes. Peu importe le niveau d'engagement professionnel du gestionnaire, les comportements de vente basés sur la valeur sont plus élevés pour les vendeurs créatifs ayant un faible engagement organisationnel. La deuxième étude révèle que l'engagement organisationnel, l'autonomisation et l'engagement professionnel sont des prédicteurs de la passion harmonieuse, tandis que l'extraversion et la surcharge liée au rôle ne contribuent pas de manière significative. Cependant, l'empathie managériale interagit avec l'extraversion et la surcharge liée au rôle des vendeurs pour prédire la passion harmonieuse, suggérant que l'empathie seule ne compense pas un manque d'extraversion chez les vendeurs. La thèse contribue à la littérature sur les ventes en démontrant empiriquement les effets positifs de la passion harmonieuse sur la créativité et les comportements de vente basés sur la valeur. Elle met également en lumière l'impact des caractéristiques du gestionnaire de magasin et

des vendeurs sur cette séquence, offrant ainsi des perspectives théoriques et pratiques en gestion des ventes.

Mots clés : Passion, créativité, vente basée sur la valeur, vente au détail, engagement organisationnel, engagement professionnel, surcharge de rôle, autonomisation, extraversion, ventes

Méthodes de recherche : Basé sur des enquêtes de type sondage, modélisation par équations structurelles, modélisation linéaire mixte

Abstract

The thesis investigates the intricate dynamics within retail sales environments, integrating Social Exchange Theory with theories related to passion and creativity to describe the conceptualized relationships. Drawing from two studies, the author examines how salespeople's characteristics and store managers influence the sequential process involving harmonious passion, creativity, value-based selling behaviors, and sales performance. Several key relationships are explored using data from 252 and 271 manager-salespeople dyads within an established art and supply retail chain. Results of the first study demonstrate that harmonious passion positively influences creativity, driving value-based selling behaviors and, subsequently, sales performance. Regardless of the manager's level of job engagement, the value-based selling behaviors are higher for creative salespeople who are low on organizational commitment. The second study reveals that organizational commitment, empowerment, and job engagement emerge as predictors of harmonious passion, whereas extraversion and role overload do not significantly contribute. However, managerial empathy interacts with salespeople's extraversion and role overload to predict salespeople's harmonious passion, suggesting that empathy alone may not compensate for a lack of salespeople's extraversion. The thesis contributes to sales literature by empirically demonstrating the positive effects of harmonious passion on creativity and value-based selling behaviors and how this sequence is impacted by the store manager's and salespeople's characteristics, offering insights into both theory and practice in sales management.

Keywords: Passion, creativity, value-based selling, retail, organizational commitment, job engagement, role overload, empowerment, extraversion, sales

Research methods: Survey-based, structural equation modeling, linear mixed modeling

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Introduction

The present doctoral dissertation comprises two distinct essays that collectively contribute to our conception of the relationships between salespeople's passion, creativity, and their impact on sales performance. While each essay stands alone as an independent research piece, they are interconnected by their shared emphasis on the passion → creativity → value-based selling behaviors process in the sales context, a multi-level dyadic perspective, and their complementary contributions to the field of sales research. Figure 1.1 illustrates our overarching model. This introduction aims to overview the two essays, highlight their interconnectedness, present the respective research objectives, and reveal their expected contributions.

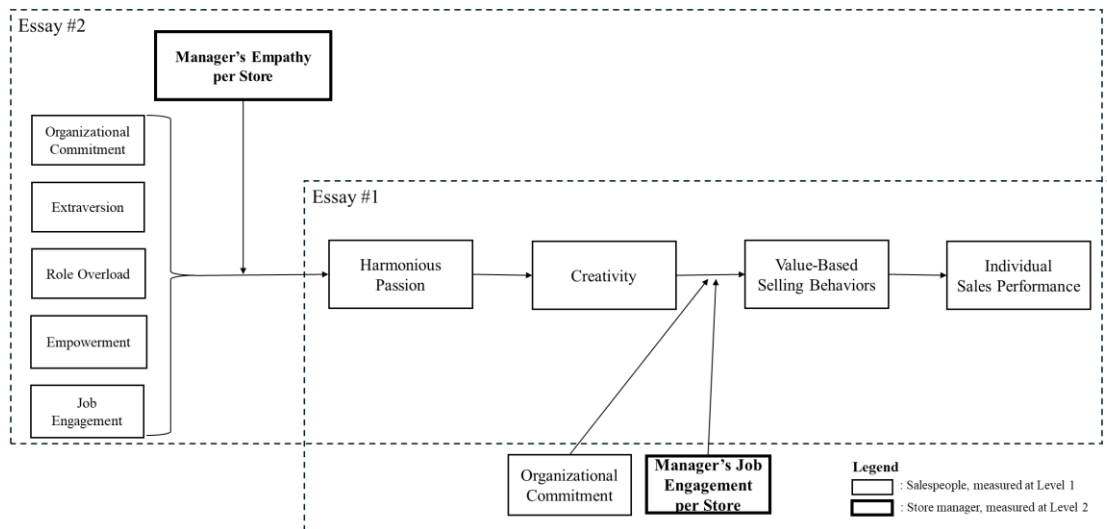


Fig. 1.1 - Dissertation Overarching Conceptual Model

The first essay, titled *How creativity predicts value-based selling behaviors and sales performances in retailing: The critical role of salespeople's commitment and store manager's job engagement*, delves into the role of the individual's creativity and its

antecedent, harmonious passion in predicting individual sales performance through value-based selling behaviors. More specifically, this essay investigates the moderating roles of the store manager's job engagement and the salesperson's organizational commitment in this process. Incorporating recent research on the conceptualization of frontline employees' passion (Crawford et al., 2022), we first contribute to the field by underscoring the mediating role of creativity between harmonious passion and salespeople's value-based selling behaviors. Next, we extend previous research accounts on creativity in sales (Agnihotri et al., 2014) and confirm the predictive relationship between creativity and value-based selling behaviors, providing theoretical support and empirical evidence of the sequential nature of this relationship. By focusing on small specialty retailers, we establish the relevance of this sales process in the retail sector and demonstrate its applicability beyond traditional business-to-business settings. Finally, we examine the moderating roles of the salespeople's organizational commitment and the store manager's job engagement in the relationship between individual creativity and value-based selling behaviors. Our findings shed light on the social exchange processes within the employee-manager relationship and emphasize the importance of reciprocal investments and mutual benefits in achieving desired sales outcomes. This insight is particularly relevant for small specialty retailers, considering the challenges they face in terms of high turnover and the need to effectively manage creative salespeople's within a value-driven context. Specifically, we emphasize the need to foster and nurture salespeople's creativity instead of centering efforts on organizational commitment initiatives, promote value-based selling behaviors in a retail setting, and develop the store manager's job engagement.

The second essay, titled "*The Influence of Salespeople's Characteristics and Managerial Empathy on Sales Performance*," expands upon the findings of the first essay and delves into the antecedents of creativity within a sales context (Agnihotri et al., 2014). This second essay is more exploratory in nature as we aim to establish theoretical foundations and provide empirical evidence on how selected salespeople's characteristics, combined with the empathy of store managers, influence the passion and creativity of salespeople in retail organizations over time. Initially, we contribute to existing literature by replicating the effects of the core process outlined in the first essay, which involves the sequence of harmonious passion leading to creativity and then to value-based selling behaviors, which impacts individual sales performance. Additionally, we contribute by elucidating the process through which salespeople's creativity emerges and translates into desirable sales behaviors, bridging the realms of passion (Crawford et al., 2022) and creativity (Agnihotri et al., 2014) in sales literature.

Furthermore, we contribute by examining the role of salespeople's characteristics—such as organizational commitment, extraversion, role overload, empowerment, and job engagement—in predicting their harmonious passion and, consequently, their individual sales performances. Lastly, we introduce the concept of empathy from the perspective of store managers toward their salespeople. This fresh viewpoint uncovers the nuanced interplay between salespeople's characteristics and managerial empathy in fostering harmonious passion. While our findings confirm the core process, they also reveal that the results of value-based selling behaviors in our dataset do not offer a clear link between the core process and individual sales performances, warranting further discussion.

Regarding the antecedents of harmonious passion, our analysis indicates that organizational commitment, empowerment, and job engagement have positive and significant effects. Interestingly, extraversion and role overload may not sufficiently stimulate harmonious passion among salespeople when considered independently. However, these factors interact with the store manager's empathy, underscoring the pivotal role of managerial behavior in shaping employee passion (Agnihotri & Krush, 2015). Notably, organizational commitment, empowerment, and job engagement do not exhibit similar interactions with empathy, highlighting unique dynamics in play.

While the two essays stand alone as individual research endeavors, they are intricately linked by their shared focus on salespeople's creativity. The first essay lays the groundwork by examining the harmonious passion → creativity → value-based selling behaviors → sales performance process, providing a foundation for the second essay to delve deeper into the predictors of such process. The two essays are united by their methodological approaches, utilizing survey-based data, including a multi-level dyadic data structure and leveraging linear mixed modeling. The consistency of our conceptualization and methodology allows for a cohesive analysis and facilitates meaningful comparisons and connections between the findings of each essay.

1. Chapter 1

How creativity predicts value-based selling behaviors and sales performances in retailing: The critical role of salespeople's commitment and store manager's job engagement

Abstract

Drawing from Social Exchange Theory, the authors propose that (1) harmonious passion positively influences value-based selling behaviors through creativity, (2) the employee's creativity has a positive effect on sales performances when mediated by value-based selling behaviors, (3) the store manager's job engagement facilitates value-based selling behaviors for highly creative employees, while (4) the employee's organizational commitment has the opposite effect. The authors test these hypotheses using a unique dataset including 252 store manager-salespeople dyads collected in a well-established art and supply retail chain. The results contribute to sales literature by empirically demonstrating the positive effect of harmonious passion on creativity, which fuels value-based selling behaviors and eventually leads to improved sales performance. The intricate relationship between the store manager's job engagement and the salespeople's organizational commitment highlights the need to educate managers on leveraging a creative and passionate salesforce. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

1.1. Introduction

In recent decades, small specialty retailers have encountered considerable challenges, placing significant strain on their sales performance. The contemporary

landscape of this industry is characterized by a declining life cycle, minimal growth prospects, a delayed adoption of computerized management tools, escalating operational expenses, talent acquisition and retention challenges, and intense competition from both online and offline retail behemoths (DellaCamera, 2022). Against the backdrop of these demanding commercial circumstances, it has become imperative for operators to leverage their internal resources by harnessing the potential of a passionate and creative workforce. This strategic recommendation aims to differentiate the consumer shopping experience offered by small specialty retailers from that provided by larger stores and online platforms.

Previous studies have acknowledged the crucial role of salespeople's creativity in augmenting productivity and overcoming significant environmental changes (Liu et al., 2016, for a meta-analysis). Developing the workforce's creativity is vital for organizations as 1) there is a need for organizations to adapt quickly to change, and 2) innovation remains a crucial driver of competitiveness and performance (Puccio & Cabra, 2010). Given the frequent association of creativity with entrepreneurship and innovation, we argue that creativity is an "in-house" strength salient amongst small specialty retailers where resource scarcity and entrepreneurial ethos prevail. To leverage this valuable asset, organizations must depend on mid-level managers, such as store managers and supervisors, given their active engagement in day-to-day operations and proximity to salespeople, making them crucial performance enablers. Consequently, conducting multi-level studies that pairs store/manager-level (Level-2) and salespeople-level (Level-1) data becomes essential to unveil the dynamics at play.

Service and sales literature share the assumption that store managers encouraging salespeople’s creativity stand a greater chance of bringing about innovation, organizational goals, and, ultimately, performance (Agnihotri et al., 2014). Building upon these findings, we integrate the work of Amabile and Fisher (2009) regarding passion and creativity with recent conceptualizations of salespeople's passion (Crawford et al., 2022), highlighting passion's essential role in this process. Surprisingly, research describing the effect of passion and creativity on performances, especially in a sales context, remains scant. Although previous studies have established the positive influence of creativity on performance, we know very little about the value-creation mechanisms underlying its effects on sales behaviors. To address this void, the present research raises the question: *What is the role of the individual's creativity and its antecedent, harmonious passion, in predicting individual sales performance through value-based selling behaviors? Furthermore, what roles do the store manager's job engagement and employee's organizational commitment play in this process?*

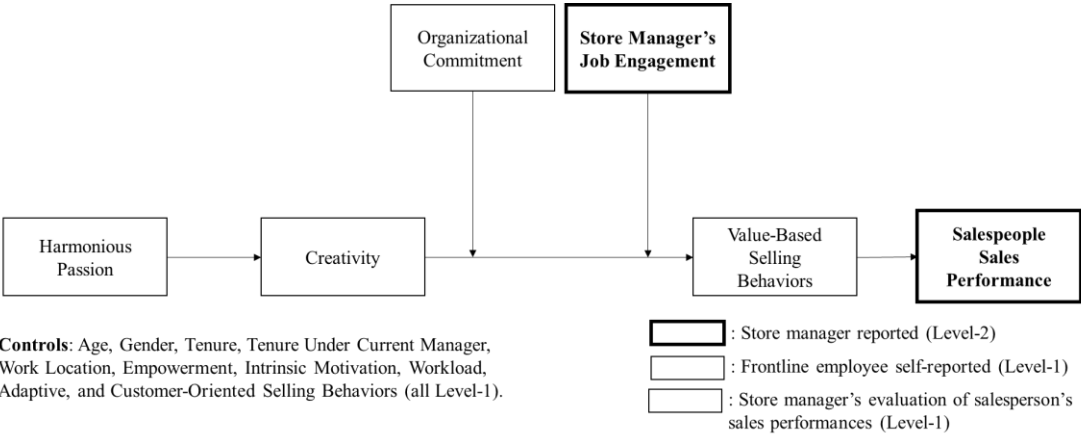


Fig. 2.1 - Conceptual framework

To predict salespeople's individual sales performance, we propose a dyadic multi-level framework (Figure 2.1) that combines harmonious passion, creativity, value-based selling behaviors, organizational commitment, and the store manager's job engagement. Specifically, we adopt a multi-level analysis when a model simultaneously examines both store managers (Level-2) and employee-reported (Level-1) variables. Our proposed model relies on Vallerand et al.'s (2003) conceptualization of *harmonious passion*, a strong motivational force that leads individuals to engage in activities they value. Despite its anecdotal reputation, passion in the workplace, especially in sales literature, remains understudied. Thankfully, psychology scholars provide solid foundations for us to explain how passion leads to creativity and how creativity enables behaviors predicting sales performances (i.e., value-based selling behaviors). Here, we conceptualize *creativity* as a product or behavior that is both novel and valuable in a social context (Amabile, 1996; Plucker et al., 2004). As for value-based selling behaviors, we initially adapted Terho et al.'s (2012) conceptualization to retail and defined *value-based selling behaviors* as the degree to which the salesperson works with the customer to craft a solution in such a way that benefits are translated into value, based on an in-depth understanding of the customer's needs, thereby convincingly demonstrating their contribution to the customer's goal achievement. The mediated portion of our model ends with the salespeople's individual sales performances, as evaluated by their store manager.

The emergence and attainment of positive, creative outcomes mobilize essential conditions. Intrinsic motivation and organizational support have been acknowledged as primary factors influencing creativity (Amabile, 1996). These two factors highlight the significance of the interaction between individual-level and organizational-level variables

in achieving outcomes surpassing individual parties' capabilities. Despite this recognition, there remains a scarcity of research examining the impact of social exchanges between frontline employees and store managers and the value attributed by each party to the relationship in the facilitation or hindrance of creativity in the workplace. Thus, our study aims to address this gap by directing our attention towards two crucial moderators: the employee's *organizational commitment*, which encompasses the “perceived bond between the individual and the organization” (Vandenberghe, 2012, p. 100) and the store manager's *job engagement*, characterized by “the investment of an individual's complete self into a role” (Rich et al., 2010, p. 617).

Our research expands upon the work of Agnihotri et al. (2014) concerning employee creativity, service behaviors, and overall performance. These authors emphasized the significance of job-specific knowledge, emotional intelligence, and manager feedback in predicting creative behaviors. In contrast, our study delves deeper into the creative process by introducing passion as a key motivational factor and using value-based behaviors to provide a more comprehensive description of the sales process. Additionally, our model enriches previous research accounts by leveraging dyadic data to emphasize the reciprocal relationships between store managers and salespeople in this context. As a result, our findings make three distinctive contributions to the discipline, as summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. - Summary of contributions

Contribution	Summary
Contribution 1	Confirmed the mediating role of creativity in the relationship between harmonious passion and value-based selling behaviors in retail settings.
Contribution 2	Established creativity as a key predictor of value-based selling behaviors, providing theoretical and empirical support for its role in sales performance.
Contribution 3	Investigated moderating roles of employee organizational commitment and store manager job engagement in the link between individual creativity and value-based selling behaviors, highlighting their importance for successful sales performance.

We first contribute to the literature on passion and creativity in the workplace by examining the relationship between harmonious passion and value-based selling behaviors mediated by creativity. While passion and creativity have been previously explored in sales literature (e.g., Dugan et al., 2019; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004), there is a limited understanding of their impact on the sales behaviors adopted by frontline employees. To resolve this gap, we argue for the crucial role of creativity in converting harmonious passion into desirable value-based selling behaviors. By elucidating this process, our study demonstrates how passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors influence one another, thus contributing to the existing knowledge in sales literature as well. Passion is significant for retailers because it drives employee motivation, enhances their expertise, fosters a positive work environment, and ultimately creates exceptional customer shopping experiences.

Our second contribution expands on the predictive relationship between creativity and value-based selling behaviors, subsequently leading to superior sales performance as evaluated by the store manager. Although the role of the salesforce in value creation is well documented (Blocker et al., 2012), we know very little about the creative roots and

theoretical foundations of this sales process. The present research aims to resolve these gaps by providing theoretical support and empirical evidence of the sequential relationship between harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors, highlighting the factors that drive effective sales approaches in a value-oriented context. Through this, we confirm the relevance of value-based selling behaviors beyond the traditional business-to-business (B2B) perspective, demonstrating its applicability and importance within the retail sector. Focusing on small specialty retailers, our research establishes creativity as a key predictor of value-based selling behaviors. It provides evidence that value-based selling behaviors can happen during shorter sales cycles and more straightforward interactions, unlike B2B paradigms. This contribution enhances our knowledge of sales strategies and highlights the broader applicability of value-based selling behaviors. Understanding the role of value-based selling behaviors in the creative process driving sales performance empowers small specialty retailers to stand out, cultivate customer relationships, shape perceptions of value, gain a competitive edge, and achieve sustainable growth in a highly competitive market. In addition, this research holds significance as we anticipate store managers to lack formal training in effectively managing creative employees. Moreover, we expect store managers to perceive creative employees as a potential threat to established frameworks or their own positions in certain instances.

Our third contribution pertains to the moderating roles of the employee's organizational commitment and the store manager's job engagement in the relationship between individual creativity and value-based selling behaviors. A common belief among social exchange theorists is that social exchanges encompass a sequence of interactions

influenced by the actions of involved parties and that under favorable circumstances, these interactions have the potential to foster high-quality relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). By examining the interplay between the employee's organizational commitment (Level-1) and the store manager's job engagement (Level-2), these findings contribute to a deeper comprehension of the factors that influence successful sales performance. Our results shed light on the social exchange processes underlying the employee-manager relationship, highlighting the importance of reciprocal investments and mutual benefits in achieving desired outcomes within a value-oriented context. These insights are particularly important as small specialty retailers struggle with high turnovers, a competitive job market, and the employee “quiet quitting” trend (Serenko, 2023).

After establishing the theoretical foundations of our model and reviewing the relevant literature, we tested our hypotheses using a survey with 272 employees matched with their respective 46 supervisors. Results are then shared, followed by a general discussion of contributions, limitations, and avenues for future research.

1.2. Research background

1.2.1. Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (Emerson, 1976) has long been drawn upon to explain organizational behaviors (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005 for a review) and is no stranger to sales scholars (e.g., Lussier & Hall, 2018; Ping, 2007). Unlike purely economic exchanges based on a cost-benefits paradigm (i.e., work-pay), social exchange theorists tend to examine latent variables (e.g., organizational commitment, feeling supported, personal obligations; Deconinck 2011). According to the theory, each party involved in the relationship values something the other party has to offer. Importantly, we tend to

focus on the exchange of behaviors rather than formalized bargaining activities. Consistent with previous Social Exchange Theory research (Cropanzano et al., 2001), we rely on dyads as the recommended unit of analysis and capitalize on the true interactionist nature of Social Exchange Theory to develop our hypotheses. Taken together, the current research posits that the store manager's job engagement serves as the foundation for supportive relationships. The subordinate perceives this engagement as a favorable treatment and stimulates salespeople's creativity and its antecedents (i.e., harmonious passion), ultimately resulting in improved sales performance. While the hypotheses revealing an interaction between the salesperson and the store manager are supported by Social Exchange Theory, the remaining hypotheses rely on the theoretical foundations provided by the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) and the intrinsic motivation of creativity theory (Amabile, 1996). Based on these accounts and our extensive literature review, we hypothesize relationships between salespeople's harmonious passion, creativity, organizational commitment, value-based selling behaviors, sales performance, and the store manager's job engagement.

1.3. Development of hypotheses

1.3.1. The core process "Harmonious Passion → Creativity → Value-Based Selling Behaviors"

Harmonious passion There is a prevailing lay belief that passion is inherent for one to experience purpose and meaning whether it is for one's life in general or one's career. From a scientific perspective, psychology scholars have previously established the positive correlation between passion (i.e., harmonious passion) and positive outcomes, including performance (Curran et al. 2015 for a meta-analysis). The shared assumption is that passion is a "strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find

important, and in which they invest time and energy” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 756). The same authors define passion in two forms based on the internalization process of the activity in one’s identity. Obsessive passion originates from internalizing external pressure (e.g., desire for social acceptance). Meanwhile, harmonious passion results from an autonomous internalization process without external contingencies (Vallerand et al., 2003). Here, we concentrate on the latter.

Harmonious passion predicts performance attainment as the individual dedication to the activity helps them overcome obstacles, persist despite difficulties or opposition, and eventually attain performance (Vallerand et al., 2007). While the sales context is notoriously characterized by hurdles, frequent rejections, and resistance, it is surprising to find so little research on passion in sales literature. Not to go under the radar, recent sales researchers have examined passion as a dimension of grit alongside perseverance and long-term goal orientation, revealing grit’s doubled-edged nature in the sales context (Dugan et al., 2019; Lussier et al., 2021). Still, several accounts expressed the need to examine passion on its own (Vallerand et al., 2003), its impact on sales and service organizations, and, in particular, the role of the manager in activating or extinguishing passion-fueled behaviors (Crawford et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2011). To address these theoretical voids, the present research joins Amabile and Fisher’s work, suggesting that “[p]eople do their most creative work when they are passionate about what they are doing” (2009, p. 491). Specifically, we expect harmonious passion to be associated with positive emotions, which, in turn, provide a sense of relevance to the organization and positive feelings toward creative activities (Cardon, 2008; St-Louis & Vallerand, 2015).

Consistent with previous sales literature dealing with the effect of creativity on salespeople's behaviors and overall performances (Agnihotri et al., 2014), we initiate our model with an antecedent known to enable creativity. The harmonious passion among small specialty retailers' employees is expected to be salient because the work is interesting, engaging, or challenging, which, in turn, translates into a powerful source of motivation. This concept of motivation led us to link passion and creativity in our framework. In its highest form, intrinsic motivation is described as passion and reflects one's complete absorption in the work (Amabile & Fisher, 2009). This process is theorized as the Intrinsic Motivation Principle of Creativity (Amabile, 1996) and introduces the second component of our model.

Creativity In an influential social psychology text, Amabile (1996, p. 35) conceptualizes Creativity in a way that “[a] product or response will be judged as creative to the extent that (a) it is both a novel and appropriate, useful, correct or valuable response to the task at hand, and (b) the task is heuristic rather than algorithmic.” The author argues that even if we rely on a constellation of personality traits, creative people are ultimately identifiable upon the quality of their work (“the product”). The first part of Amabile's definition hints at the value-creation characteristic of creativity, which aligns with the value-based behaviors studied in the present paper. As for the second part of the definition, algorithmic tasks refer to those for which the path to the solution is clear and readily available, as opposed to heuristics tasks that require the development of an algorithm to reach a solution (Amabile, 1996). Accordingly, we expect value-based selling behaviors to be developed through a creative process that involves heuristic tasks. Since heuristics tasks tend to rely on a limited subset of information available, we content

that the value-based selling behaviors process allows salespeople to craft valuable offers under time constraints and limited information through inquiries, responsiveness, creativity, and ultimately communicating and delivering value to customers. Alternative conceptualization defines creativity as “the interaction among aptitude, process, and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context” (Plucker et al., 2004, p. 90). While sharing the same ideas of product, novelty, and usefulness, the authors hint at the social context of creativity. This suggestion is particularly relevant as the present research aims to elucidate the manager-employee relationships involving creativity and selling behaviors.

Creativity is no stranger to sales research. For instance, Agnihotri et al. (2014) developed a value-added model to describe how boundary spanner can improve service behaviors and overall performances, relying on creativity at its core. Similarly, creative selling behaviors have been found to improve both service behaviors and sales performance (Groza et al., 2016). Other accounts have defined the salesperson's creative performance as “the amount of new ideas generated and novel behaviors exhibited by the salesperson in performing his or her job activities” (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004, p. 806). Finally, we learn that salesforce’s creativity interacts with higher-level variables (e.g., organizational culture) to bolster performance (Wang & Miao, 2015). Yet, the investigation of the process involving antecedents and consequences of salesperson creativity and its effect on sales performances remains under-researched (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). These different accounts provided convincing evidence of the positive

relationships between creativity, salespeople behaviors, and sales performances when organizational and managerial supports are favorable.

Value-Based Selling Behaviors While value-based selling behaviors are known for transforming a firm's value proposition into sales performances in B2B environments (e.g., Agnihotri et al., 2014; Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih, 2018; Terho et al., 2015), we argue that value-based selling relies heavily on seller-customer interactions and perfectly depict the type of service delivered by salespeople in small specialty retailers. The success of such retailers depends heavily on seller-customer interactions where salespeople are expected to be equipped with category-related skills, possess extensive product/service knowledge, and be flexible, which are all factors known to enable value creation (Goudge et al., 2017). For these reasons, we revise our conceptualization and adopt a more encompassing vision by borrowing Töytäri & Rajala's value-base selling definition, that is—"a sales approach that builds on identification, quantification, communication, and verification of customer value" (2015, p. 101). Value-based sales literature in the B2C context remains scant, if not absent. This void is shocking as specialty retailers struggle to distinguish their value proposition from the ones of brick-and-mortar and online giants. In a context of intense competition and macroeconomics pressure (e.g., high inflation and interest rates), it is now crucial for operators to enhance value communication and delivery to customers by adopting value-based selling behaviors in an ultimate effort to attenuate the industry's decline. Our first hypothesis addresses this issue.

In H1, we describe the process that ties harmonious passion to value-based selling behaviors through creativity. H1 argues that for highly passionate salespeople, passion constitutes a source of motivation strong enough to be conducive to creativity. To borrow

Amabile and Fisher's words, "[p]eople do their most creative work when they are passionate about what they are doing" (Amabile & Fisher, 2009, p. 491). Value-based selling behaviors require employees to understand what the customers want and value, to choose or adapt the offering, and to communicate how this offering constitutes the best value (Töytäri et al., 2011). Consequently, we argue for a specific sequence where harmonious passion drives creativity, which, in turn, leads to value-creation behaviors. Formally, we posit:

H1 Salespeople's creativity mediates the positive relationship between harmonious passion and value-based selling behaviors.

1.3.2. The process "Creativity → Value-Based Selling Behaviors → Sales Performance"

While our first hypothesis explains the crucial role of creativity in turning passion into desirable selling behaviors, the second sequence addresses the effect of these behaviors on sales performance. We claim that creativity is the common thread necessary to tailor recommendations and effectively communicate how an offering suits the customer, ultimately enhancing sales performance (Lussier et al., 2017; Terho et al., 2015). Whether it is to sell a mattress or fancy watercolor brushes, salespeople's creativity manifests itself through a recognizable process: 1) problem definition, 2) relevant information gathering, 3) idea generation, 4) validation and communication of the idea (Amabile, 1996). This sequence seems familiar because it mirrors the steps of the value-based selling process (Liu & Zhao, 2021; Terho et al., 2012). Consequently, we expect the bond between creativity and value-based selling behaviors to happen organically.

Since value-based selling is rooted in B2B literature, documented outcomes focus on the client's bottom line (e.g., client's profitability, performance enhancements, and

cost savings; Terho et al., 2015). The present research adopts a contrasting perspective and measures sales performances at the frontline employee level while expanding our knowledge of the relationships leading to such outcomes. When it comes to small specialty retailers, we expect salespeople to offer an immersive experience where customers are provided with the opportunity to touch and try the product, where products are described in great detail, where the spectrum of options is adapted to the customer's goals, and where the purchase decisions are validated by the salesperson's "expert" recommendations. These value-creation dynamics are particularly important in a changing marketplace where buyers tend to avoid salespeople, resist sales-motivated associates, and prefer sales interactions that focus on their unique needs (Goudge et al., 2017). Put together, we argue for a sequence where salespeople's creativity enables desirable value-based selling behaviors, increasing salesperson performances. Formally,

H2 Salespeople's value-based selling behaviors mediate the positive relationship between creativity and store manager-perceived sales performance.

1.3.3. The moderating role of the store manager's job engagement

Creativity literature confirms the role of context in enabling or attenuating creativity (Amabile, 1996). Previous service-oriented research has studied the effect of various contextual moderators on salespeople's creativity, ranging from job characteristics (Coelho & Augusto, 2010) to close supervisory monitoring (Zhou, 2003). Very little has been written on how employee-supervisor dynamics interact with creativity to enhance or diminish sales behaviors. To address this gap, we first pay special attention to the role of the store manager. More precisely, we look at the store manager's job engagement as "the investment of an individual's complete self into a role" (Rich et al., 2010, p. 617). We find several compelling arguments for including job engagement in our

model. First, engagement is holistic and provides a more comprehensive view of the manager's role than focused variables (Rich et al., 2010). Second, engagement is conceptualized as a mechanism that links motivational factors (i.e., nature of the work, positive affectivity) and outcomes such as organizational commitment and performance (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Third, job engagement has been previously studied alongside creativity (e.g., Aldabbas et al., 2021; Ismail et al., 2019), but to our knowledge, never in a dyadic study. For all these reasons, the store manager's job engagement appears to be the most theoretically relevant management-level moderator for our proposed model.

In H3, we propose that the store manager's job engagement encompasses many aspects of management that could be perceived as beneficial in an employee-supervisor exchange relationship. Consistent with previous literature addressing organizational factors supporting creativity (Zhou & George, 2001) and the Social Exchange Theory framework, we anticipate that the store manager's job engagement will be perceived as a form of organizational support for creativity, creating a reciprocal dynamic within the employee-supervisor exchange relationship. Employees under store managers with high job engagement are likely to reciprocate this support by investing their creativity into innovative selling strategies, thus reinforcing the positive exchange cycle. Formally,

H3 The interaction between the store manager's job engagement and the salespeople's creativity positively predicts the level of salespeople's value-based selling behaviors, with a stronger effect of creativity on value-based selling behaviors when the store manager displays greater job engagement.

1.3.4. The moderating role of the employee's organizational commitment

Instead of relying on a single moderator encompassing both employee and manager perspectives, we contend that in a genuine social exchange relationship, the actions exhibited by each party may not precisely mirror those of their counterpart. While insights have been gained into the comprehensive nature of the manager's role through examining job engagement, we suggest that the construct of organizational commitment more accurately characterizes subordinates' reactions. This choice is motivated by the organizational commitment construct's macro-level foci and its effect on work outcomes (Vandenberghe, 2012). Organizational commitment is well known for its convenience in assessing the relationships between individual-level variables' impact on organizational-level outcomes (e.g., absenteeism, turnover, motivation, and performance; Klein et al., 2012). Organizational behavior scholars tend to conceptualize organizational commitment regarding its confounding antecedents or outcomes. Regardless of the approach, the concept of bond strength to the commitment target prevails in most definitions (Klein et al., 2012). Consistent with this stream of research, we join previous research and pair organizational commitment with job engagement (e.g., Cesário & Chambel, 2017) to reveal valuable insights concerning creativity, passion, and engagement.

In sales, organizational commitment predicts salespeople's attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes, including performance (Brown and Peterson 1993 for a meta-analysis). This line of research characterizes employees as being highly committed to organizational commitment and willing to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization (Michaels et al., 1988), which reaffirms the reciprocity focus of our Social Exchange Theory lens. Accordingly, such effort is expected to moderate the relationship between

creativity and value-based selling behaviors. Consequently, H4 argues that the employees' organizational commitment is required to act as a catalyst to effectively convert creativity into value-based selling behaviors. A salesperson with low organizational commitment would not see the point in engaging in demanding sales behaviors and is expected to score low in value-based selling behaviors. Organizational commitment would be the obliging force that triggers a person to adopt creativity-fueled selling behaviors known to improve sales performance. Therefore, we posit:

H4 The interaction between the salespeople's organizational commitment and the salespeople's creativity positively predicts the level of salespeople's value-based selling behaviors, with a stronger effect on creativity when salespeople display greater organizational commitment.

1.3.5. Three-way interaction

Now that we have established the relevance of both moderators individually, our focus turns to the interactions between the two and how these underlying forces impact our proposed process. From a social exchange perspective, "people are more likely to initiate commitments when the subsequent state of commitment is perceived to include certain anticipated rewards that justify the added obligations" (Brown, 1996, p. 238). Here, we predict the store manager's job engagement will embody such rewards. We expect employees under a highly engaged store manager to feel supported, strengthening the employee's organizational commitment and creating the most conducive environment between creativity and value-based selling behaviors. Accordingly, highly committed employees are expected to generate greater performance by mobilizing a beneficial work setting, triggering motivation to undertake job activities and transform these tasks into meaningful accomplishments (Ismail et al., 2019).

In H5, we explore the extent to which creativity is conducive to value-based selling behaviors and how the effect should depend on both the store manager's job engagement and the employee's organizational commitment. We expect value-based selling behaviors to increase for employees low on organizational commitment but high in creativity as the store manager's job engagement level heightens. The store manager's job engagement would counteract the employee's lack of commitment. Based on the same reasoning, we would expect employees high in organizational commitment and high in creativity to provide the highest value-based selling behavior results under a manager high in job engagement. On the other side, we expect individuals low in creativity to experience minimal variation in terms of value-based selling behaviors. A lack of creativity would seriously impede the employee's value-based selling behaviors. Moreover, the level of organizational commitment or store manager's job engagement would not impact value-based selling behaviors since these moderators are not expected to generate creativity out of thin air but rather be conducive to creative predispositions. Therefore, we expect the store manager's job engagement and the employee's organizational commitment to interact with creativity to enhance/diminish value-based selling behaviors. Formally,

H5a There is a significant positive interaction effect between the store manager's job engagement and salespeople's organizational commitment on salespeople's value-based selling behaviors among highly creative salespeople.

H5b There is a significant negative interaction effect between the manager's job store engagement and salespeople's organizational commitment on salespeople's value-based selling behaviors among less creative salespeople.

1.4. Methodology

1.4.1. Sample and data collection

To test our hypotheses, we administered a survey in a well-established art and supply retail chain with thirty-four stores spread across Canada. Focusing on a single organization allows us to circumvent competing explanations that could be industry-dependent or related to singular external environmental factors. Moreover, we expect salespeople in our sample to share a common interest in art where creativity should be salient amongst employees, making this setting particularly fruitful. Finally, the specificity of this industry—small specialty retailers—shall help circumvent the debate on whether creativity is a general or domain-specific set of skills, aptitudes, traits, propensities, or motivation (Baer, 2012). The data collection was comprised of one exploratory survey in February 2022, followed by the primary data collection, including all proposed constructs, in November 2022.

Our conceptual model offers two levels of analysis: store manager (i.e., team-level) and employee-level. We administered two distinct surveys between store managers and their salespeople. The store managers' survey included self-evaluated items and items rating subordinates' performances. The team members were surveyed for self-evaluated items. In addition, we collected typical demographic and theoretically relevant control variables (e.g., tenure, work environment). The instrument was available in both Canada's official languages. Complete anonymity and confidentiality were maintained during all the steps of the process.

Upon completion, we obtained the following numbers of participants (and response rate): 272 employees (62.0%) and 46 store managers (87.6%) for a total of 318

participants (64.2%). Once the matching was completed, we found 252 valid store manager-employee dyads. Our sample comprises 69.0% females, and the mean age is 42 years ($SD = 8.65$). The average tenure in the organization is 9 years ($SD = 3.97$), and the average period under the current store manager is 4.47 years ($SD = 1.76$).

1.4.2. Measures and scales

We used a dyadic survey design, for which we had two sources of information: matched salespeople and the store manager. In this context, all variables reported by the store manager are categorized as Level-2, whereas variables reported by the salespeople are classified as Level-1. We adopted the following steps to assess and mitigate the variance attributable to this measurement method. First, we rely on multi-source data (i.e., store manager and salespeople), which is expected to reduce common method variance as all construct data are not collected from a single respondent (Hulland et al., 2018). Secondly, respondents were guaranteed anonymity to avoid social desirability bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Thirdly, we adopt Linear Mixed Modeling to account for multilevel data by estimating both fixed and random effects to account for violating the assumption of independence in multi-level designs (West et al., 2007). The scales' items are detailed in Appendix 1.8.1.

Harmonious passion (Level-1) Consistent with the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003), we measured passion with seven self-evaluated items associated with harmonious passion and based on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (completely agree). Examples are “the new things that I discover with this activity allow me to appreciate it even more” and “for me, it is a passion that I still manage to control.” Items associated with obsessive passion were omitted since this type of passion is not relevant to our proposed model.

Creativity (Level-1) While our theoretical development relies greatly on Amabile's work (e.g., Amabile 1996), the associated measurement tool (i.e., consensual assessment technique) is not suitable for this study. Firstly, it is challenging to operationalize on a large number of respondents as it relies on the judgment of "experts." Secondly, using "experts" or judges remains controversial in determining the appropriate level of expertise required (Plucker & Markel, 2010). Thirdly, research relying on this assessment method has been criticized for lacking empirical evidence demonstrating its predicting value (Plucker & Markel, 2010). Consequently, we opted for a 5-item self-evaluated creativity scale adapted to the sales context (Lussier et al., 2017) ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree). Examples are "I suggest new ways to achieve goals or objectives" and "I exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity to."

Value-based selling behaviors (Level-1) The employee's ability to articulate and deliver value in a sales context is measured using Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih's (2018) 3-item scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (completely agree). Examples are "I have the ability to articulate a product/service worth in time, effort, and money" and "I have the ability to make customer feeling of getting his/her money's worth." This scale is succinct and less B2B oriented when compared to Terho et al. (2015)'s scale, which supports its use here.

Job engagement (Level-2) The store manager's job engagement (i.e., physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement) measures rely on a simplified version of the scale proposed by Rich et al. (2010). The 3-item scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5

(completely agree) includes items such as “I put in a lot of effort at work” and “I am focused on my work tasks.”

Organizational commitment (Level-1) Our research revealed a broad variety of documented scales to access this construct ranging from 6-item (Deconinck & Johnson 2009) to 15-item (Mowday et al., 1982) scales. We decided to adopt the former to reduce survey fatigue because it takes root in sales literature. Items examples are “I do not feel like ‘part of the family’ at my organization (reverse scored)” and “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization” measured on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Sales performance (Level-1) To assess the store manager-rated subjective evaluation of salespeople’s sales performance, we rely on the scale proposed by Lussier et al. (2021) and the work of Martin and Bush (2006). The scale is composed of 5 items ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (completely agree). Examples are “This person has a good overall sales performance” and “This salesperson reaches overall objectives.”

Control variables Intuitively, we expect the level of passion and creativity exhibited by employees to fade over time as they get comfortable in their routines. However, creativity literature reveals that job stability—which would be expected to come later in one’s career—is an antecedent to creativity (Amabile, 1996). Moreover, previous research has also posited that employees with high organizational commitment would remain in the organization for longer, allowing them to develop their skills and improve performance (Pettijohn et al., 2007). To address these ambiguities, we measured the employee tenure in the organization. Furthermore, to ensure alignment with the measure of individual performance, we measured all additional control variables at the

employee's level. These control variables encompass the employee's empowerment level, intrinsic motivation, role overload, tenure under the current store manager, education, gender, age, and store vs. headquarters work environment. Finally, we accounted for two alternate sales-related behaviors, namely adaptive and customer-oriented selling behaviors. The salespeople's *empowerment* level refers to the extent to which employees are given autonomy, responsibility, and decision-making authority in their roles (Martin & Bush, 2006). Controlling for this variable is crucial because employees with different levels of empowerment may approach their tasks differently, which could confound the relationship between passion, creativity, and selling behaviors. *Intrinsic motivation* is the inherent drive within individuals to fulfill their innate needs, fostering a sense of personal growth, integrity, and well-being, often achieved through a sense of autonomy and without any external rewards (Mallin et al., 2022). We control for intrinsic motivation because employees with higher intrinsic motivation might exhibit different behaviors and attitudes than those with lower intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, due to our strong reliance on Amabile's theory of intrinsic motivation for creativity (Amabile, 1996), we validate whether our antecedent passion also aligns with intrinsic motivation, thereby supporting our hypotheses. Controlling for *role overload*—that is “the volume of demands that comprise an individual's role” (Schaubroeck et al., 1989, p. 40)—is essential because employees may have varying levels of stress, job satisfaction, or performance. By controlling for this variable, we ensure that any observed effects are not solely due to differences in the amount of work each employee handles. The time an employee has worked under their current store manager may affect their relationship with the store manager, impacting job performance evaluation. Controlling for this variable allows us to

focus on the influence of the proposed moderating variables while considering the stability and experience with the current store managerial relationship. Finally, we also control for two strong antecedents of sales performances: adaptive and customer-oriented selling behaviors (Mullins et al., 2020; Mullins & Syam, 2014). By including these two alternate variables, we expect to isolate the effects of value-based selling behaviors from other selling behaviors and determine their specific contribution to sales performance. In other words, if value-based selling behaviors are significantly related to sales performance after controlling for the different behaviors, it provides stronger evidence for a potential causal relationship. By relying on these control variables, we ensure that any observed effects are not solely due to differences at the employee's level.

1.5. Results

1.5.1. Measurement properties

Initial assessment of reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity revealed cross-loading for one harmonious passion item and one organizational commitment item. Both problematic items were removed from our calculations. Using AMOS 28, we then found that the composite reliability (CR) for all constructs exceeds .70 except for salespeople's empowerment (control; .62), which indicates proper convergence and model stability (Hair et al., 2019). Additionally, Cronbach's alpha and average variance extracted (AVE) surpassed the commonly accepted thresholds. Finally, the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds the correlation with any other construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table summarizes the constructs' correlations and relevant descriptive statistics.

Table 2.2 - Correlation matrix and descriptive statistics

Constructs and Descriptive Statistics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Salespeople's Harmonious Passion	1								
2. Salespeople's Creativity	0.42**	1							
3. Salespeople's Value-Based Selling Behaviors	0.29**	0.52**	1						
4. Salespeople's Job Engagement (control)	0.41**	0.48**	0.40**	1					
5. Salespeople's Organizational Commitment	0.416**	0.293**	0.267**	0.504**	1				
6. Store Manager's Job Engagement	-0.03	-0.05	-0.06	-0.05	-0.03	1			
7. Salespeople's Sales Performances (manager rated)	0.05	0.25**	0.23**	0.15*	0.16*	0.39**	1		
8. Salespeople's Intrinsic Motivation (control)	0.40**	0.37**	0.37**	0.51**	0.58	-0.07	0.10	1	
9. Salespeople's Empowerment (control)	0.38**	0.54**	0.39**	0.57**	0.40**	-0.09	0.23**	0.37**	1
10. Salespeople's Role Overload (control)	-0.16**	0.15**	-0.02	-0.08	-0.24**	0.00	0.15*	-0.16**	0.15*
11. Salespeople's Adaptive Selling Behaviors (control)	0.40**	0.57**	0.65**	0.38**	0.31**	-0.02	0.27**	0.52**	0.35**
12. Salespeople's Customer-Oriented Selling Behaviors (control)	0.36**	0.44**	0.62**	0.47**	0.29**	-0.06	0.09	0.47**	0.34**
13. Salespeople's Age (control)	-0.03	0.11	0.01	0.24**	0.23**	0.00	0.14*	0.15*	0.22**
14. Salespeople's Gender (control)	0.04	-0.03	0.05	0.00	0.03	-0.17**	0.04	-0.03	0.02
15. Salespeople's Tenure in Organization (control)	-0.05	0.17**	-0.04	0.16**	0.16**	0.02	0.21**	0.12	0.23**
16. Salespeople's Tenure Under Current Manager (control)	-0.03	0.11	0.01	0.01	0.25	-0.05	0.15*	0.10	0.11
17. Salespeople's Work Location (control)	0.06	-0.02	0.14*	-0.04	0.13*	-0.01	0.14*	0.02	-0.05
Mean	5.60	5.31	5.90	4.33	4.66	4.61	5.74	4.96	4.01
SD	1.15	1.13	0.98	0.66	1.32	0.51	1.04	1.33	0.70
Cronbach's alpha	0.92	0.91	0.89	0.77	0.82	0.79	0.90	0.76	0.62
Composite reliability (CR)	0.92	0.91	0.89	0.77	0.80	0.83	0.91	0.77	0.62
Average variance extracted (AVE)	0.67	0.67	0.73	0.53	0.46	0.62	0.68	0.53	0.38

Constructs and Descriptive Statistics	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Salespeople's Harmonious Passion								
2. Salespeople's Creativity								
3. Salespeople's Value-Based Selling Behaviors								
4. Salespeople's Job Engagement (control)								
5. Salespeople's Organizational Commitment								
6. Store Manager's Job Engagement								
7. Salespeople's Sales Performances (manager rated)								
8. Salespeople's Intrinsic Motivation (control)								
9. Salespeople's Empowerment (control)								
10. Salespeople's Role Overload (control)	1							
11. Salespeople's Adaptive Selling Behaviors (control)	-0.06	1						
12. Salespeople's Customer-Oriented Selling Behaviors (control)	-0.13*	0.63**	1					
13. Salespeople's Age (control)	0.12	0.06	0.05	1				
14. Salespeople's Gender (control)	0.00	0.06	0.01	-0.16**	1			
15. Salespeople's Tenure in Organization (control)	0.15*	0.07	0.00	0.58**	-0.13*	1		
16. Salespeople's Tenure Under Current Manager (control)	0.12*	0.05	0.02	0.28**	-0.01	0.49**	1	
17. Salespeople's Work Location (control)	-0.15*	0.17**	0.14*	-0.27**	0.19**	-0.29**	0.00	1
Mean	2.32	5.58	6.42	34.7	N/A	5.83	3.01	N/A
SD	1.22	1.18	0.79	15.2	N/A	7.26	3.38	N/A
Cronbach's alpha	0.93	0.92	0.90	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Composite reliability (CR)	0.93	0.92	0.90	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Average variance extracted (AVE)	0.82	0.71	0.75	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

*p<.05;**p<.01 (2-tailed)

Regarding the proposed model fit, we ran two confirmatory factor analyses (CFA): one including all the key constructs and one with the control variables altogether. For the first model, we find a χ^2 of 915.65 with 384 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.01$) and a χ^2/df ratio of 2.38. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .904), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.884), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = .049) each provide evidence of a good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh et al., 2004). As for the control variables' model, we find a χ^2 of 252.21 with 109 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.01$) and χ^2/df ratio of 2.31. The CFI = .950, the TLI = .930, and the RSMEA = .047 also favor of a

proper model fit. Based on these results, the direct effects, mediation, and moderation analyses can be conducted with confidence.

1.5.2. Linear Mixed Modeling

Neglecting the influence of group dynamics, which are known to impact individual behaviors, can result in erroneous conclusions when explaining an individual's behavior. Multilevel data sets allow researchers to study individual observations nested within higher-level groups. The proposed model relies on linear mixed modeling (LMM) and introduces measures performed at two different levels—salespeople and store manager levels. This approach suits our data for the following reasons. First, LMM allows researchers to avoid the aggregation or disaggregation problem, permits the decomposition of variance in outcomes across two hierarchical levels, and explains this variance at corresponding levels (Heck et al., 2013). Second, LMM can analyze unbalanced data sets that include missing data. Finally, LMM accounts for our multilevel data's correlated and dependent nature by specifying random effects for the residuals (West et al., 2007). These principles are applied to the following hypotheses test.

1.5.3. Test of hypotheses

To examine our hypotheses, we employ five distinct models. Model 1 uses creativity as the dependent variable, while models 2 to 4 incorporate value-based selling behaviors as the focal variable, and model 5 considers sales performance as the outcome variable. Figure 2.2 provides an overview of the main effects of the proposed framework. The effects related to the core mediated process are all significant and in the expected direction. However, the direct effect for neither moderator is significant, which warrants special attention in our moderation analysis below.

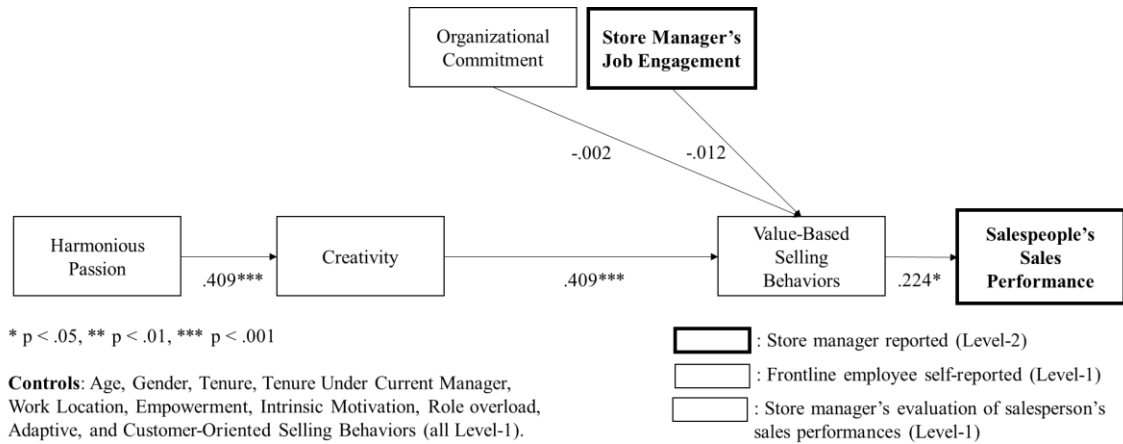


Fig. 2.2 - Presentation of main effects

Mediation analyses (H1-H2) The first two hypotheses divide the main mediation path of the model and are examined using MLmed SPSS macro, which relies on LMM (Rockwood, 2019). This is because the macro is designed to handle multilevel data sets but is limited to one sequential mediator at a time. All variables have been standardized before being processed by the macro. For H1, the indirect effect “harmonious passion (level 1) → creativity (level 1) → value-based selling behaviors (level 1)” is significant as the confidence interval does not include zero (H1: Ind. Effect = .1041; CI = (.0515, .1685). H2 covers the second part of the mediation process. Here, the indirect effect “creativity (level 1) → value-based selling behaviors (level 1) → sales performance (level 1)” is also significant (H2: Ind. Effect = .0376; CI = (.0012, .0836). All indirect effects are computed using 10,000 Monte Carlo samples. For both hypotheses, we controlled for the same covariates used for the direct effects included in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 - The direct and interaction effects of harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors

	Salespeople's Creativity	Salespeople's Value-Based Selling Behaviors			Salespeople's Sales Performances
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	0.07	0.14	0.18	0.18	-0.32
Salespeople's Variables - Level 1					
Harmonious Passion (HP)	0.26***				
Creativity (C)		0.41***	0.39***	0.40***	
Value-Based Selling Behaviors					0.22*
Organizational Commitment (OC)		-0.00	-0.00	-0.01	
Intrinsic Motivation (control)	0.19**	0.20**	0.20**	0.20**	
Responsibilization (control)	0.33***	0.18**	0.18**	0.18**	
Workload (control)	0.18***	-0.08	-0.09	-0.08	
Adaptive Selling Behaviors (control)					0.20*
Customer-Oriented Selling Behaviors (control)					-0.21*
Age (control)	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gender Female = 2 (control)	-0.10	-0.09	-0.07	-0.06	0.22
Tenure in organization (control)	0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	0.03**
Tenure under current manager (control)	0.00	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
Store Manager's Variables and Store-Level Variables - Level 2					
Job Engagement (MJE)		0.00	-0.01	0.03	
Work Location HQ = 1 (control)	-0.11	-0.20	-0.20	-0.22	-0.72**
Interaction					
OC x C			-0.17**	-0.16**	
MJE x C			0.13**	0.09	
OC x MJE			-0.24	0.00	
OC x MJE x C				-0.09*	
Schwarz's Bay. Crit. (BIC)	660.60	627.51	624.47	624.93	659.88

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Note: All the coefficients are standardized expect for age, gender, tenure in the organization, tenure under current management, and work location which are categorical or continuous variables.

As expected, the employee's harmonious passion positively affects the employee's creativity, which, in turn, positively affects the employee's value-based selling behaviors in support of H1. Shifting toward our outcome variable, we find support for H2 as the

employee's creativity positively affects the value-based selling behaviors, leading to a positive store manager's evaluation of the corresponding employee's sales performance.

Moderation analysis (H3-H4) H3 and H4 examine the moderating role of the employee's organizational commitment and the store job engagement on the relationship between creativity and value-based selling behaviors. Here, we rely on SPSS MIXED command to conduct a series of LMM. This command is flexible enough to handle multilevel and hierarchical models, including specified mediators, moderators, and control variables. This approach is proper as one of our moderators and our dependent variable reflect different levels of data interpretation. For both H3 and H4, we rely on Model 3, detailed in Table 2.3, where we measure the interaction between the store manager's job engagement and the employee's creativity and the interaction between the employee's organizational commitment and creativity.

For H3, we look at the store manager's job engagement as a moderator between the employee's creativity and value-based selling behaviors. The analysis reveals a significant interaction between the store manager's job engagement and the employee's creativity ($\beta=.13, p<.05$). To interpret this effect correctly, we refer to Figure 2.3. The figure depicts the effect of low (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) and high (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean) levels of store manager's job engagement on value-based selling behaviors at low (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) and high (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean) levels of creativity. The effectiveness of creativity in promoting value-based selling behaviors is highly dependent on the level of the store manager's job engagement. Specifically, when job engagement is high

compared to low, creativity has a stronger positive effect on value-based selling behaviors. H3 is supported.

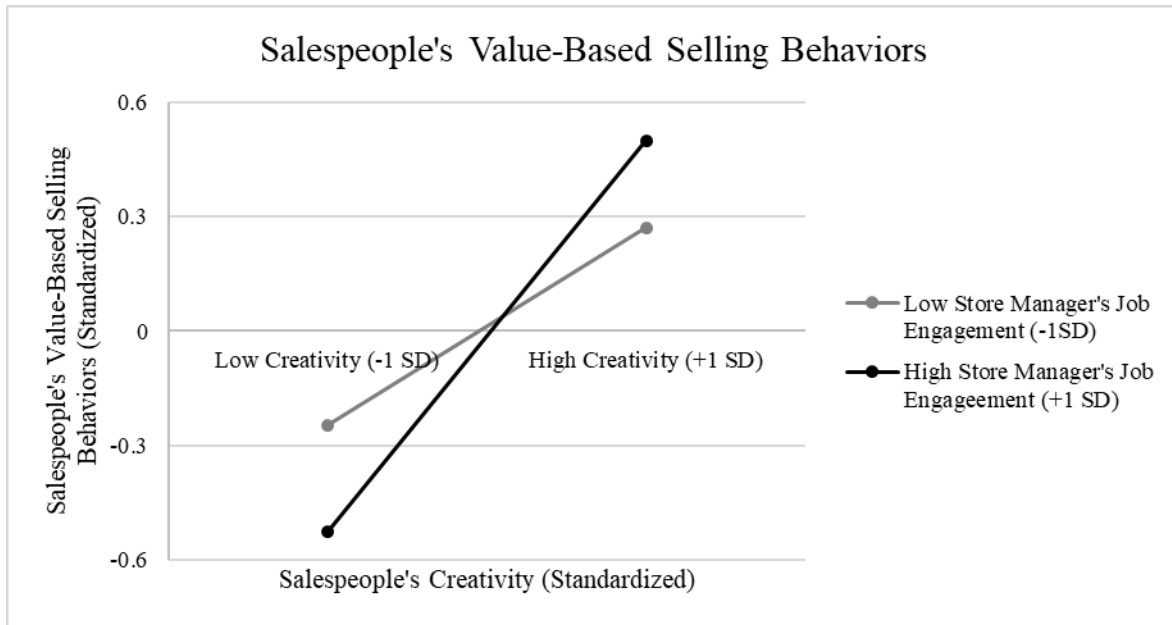


Fig. 2.3 - Job engagement interaction with creativity

For H4, our focus turns to the salespeople’s organizational commitment as a moderator between creativity and value-based selling behaviors. The analysis reveals significant interactions between the salespeople’s organizational commitment and the salespeople’s creativity ($\beta=-.17, p<.01$). To make sense of this negative effect, we refer to Figure 2.4. The figures show the effect of low (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) and high (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean) levels of organizational commitment on value-based selling behaviors at low (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) and high (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean) levels of creativity. Surprisingly, higher levels of organizational commitment are not conducive to higher value-based selling behaviors values for creative salespeople. Instead, we find that for

highly creative salespeople, high levels of organizational commitment impair their value-based selling behaviors. H4 is not supported.

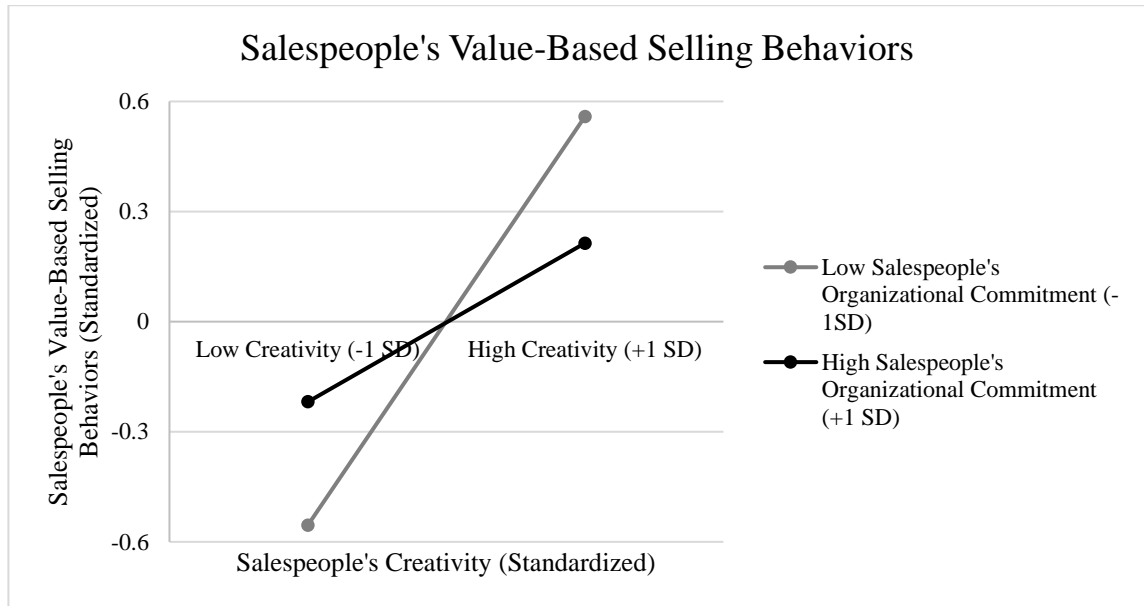


Fig. 2.4- Organizational commitment interaction with creativity

In H5a,b, we explore how both moderators interact together with creativity to influence the salespeople's value-based selling behaviors with a 3-way interaction (Table 2.3, Model 4). The result provides evidence for a significant and negative interaction term ($\beta = -.09, p < .05$). Figure 2.5 illustrates the 3-way interaction. We find that regardless of the level of the store manager's job engagement, the value-based selling behaviors are higher for creative salespeople who are low on organizational commitment. However, the results show a significant increase in value-based selling behaviors for creative individuals under store managers high in job engagement (Figure 2.5, right panel). In other words, for salespeople under a store manager high in job engagement, their creativity dominates the effect of their organizational commitment. We don't find support for H5a,b.

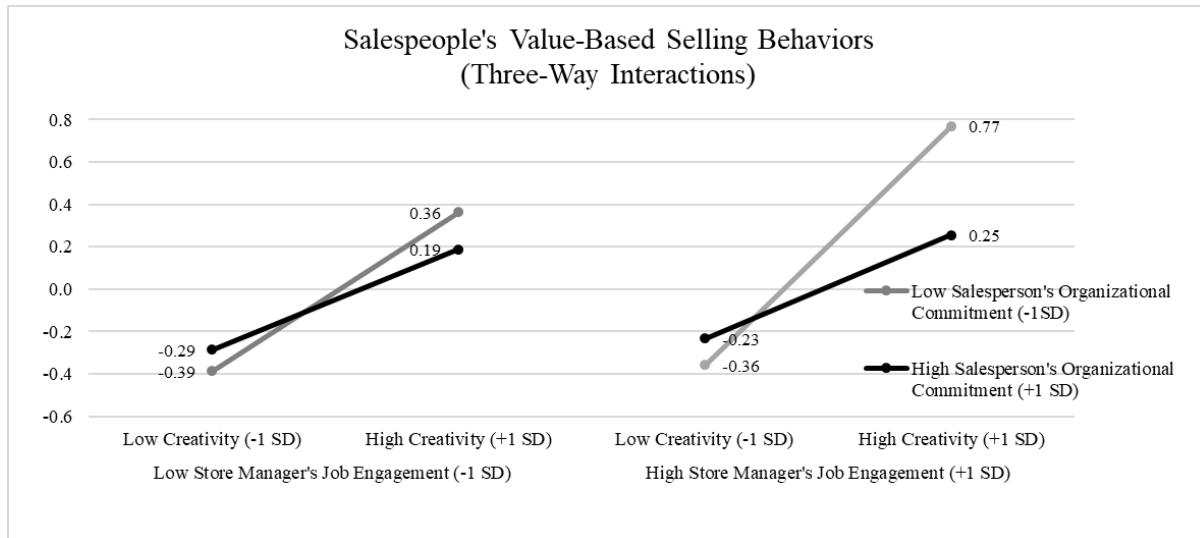


Fig. 2.5- Three-way interactions

Finally, Table 2.3 highlights the direct effects of our model, including the positive effect of harmonious passion on creativity ($\beta=.26, p<.001$; Model 1), creativity on value-based selling behaviors (all β s positive and significant; Model 2-4), and value-based selling behaviors on sales performances ($\beta=.22, p<.05$; Model 5). Salespeople high in harmonious passion exhibit high levels of creativity, which positively impact their value-based selling behaviors, and where store managers provide higher sales performance evaluations for salespeople high in value-based selling behaviors.

The effects of our control variables In terms of control variables, intrinsic motivation, empowerment, and role overload are added to Models 1-4. We find a significant positive effect for all control variables in all models except for role overload, which is only significantly positive for creativity. These results align with creativity literature and the assumption that creativity is highly influenced by external factors (e.g., empowerment and role overload) and internal factors (e.g., intrinsic motivation). As for the outcome variable in Model 5, we control for selling behavior alternatives (i.e.,

adaptive and customer-oriented selling behaviors) as predictors of sales performance. We find a significant positive direct effect for adaptive selling behaviors ($\beta=.20, p<.05$; Model 5) and a significant negative effect for customer-oriented behaviors ($\beta=-.21, p<.05$; Model 5). Consistent with the sales literature, customer-orientation should be more salient for long sales cycle (Chakrabarty et al., 2012), hence the negative effect in a retail setting, while adaptive selling is somewhat situational (Franke & Park, 2006), which is better suited to specialized retail. Finally, we control all models for age, gender, tenure in the organization, tenure under the current store manager, and work location.

1.6. General discussion

Our unique conceptual framework theorizes the processes that lead salespeople to adopt value-based selling behaviors, a key determinant of sales performance in a highly competitive marketplace. We present an original contribution to sales literature by integrating Vallerand's dualistic model of passion with Amabile's seminal work on creativity. Relying on the true interactionist nature of Social Exchange Theory as the foundation of our work, our model is tested with an original salespeople-store manager paired survey data including 252 dyads from a well-renowned Canadian art and supply retail chain. Our hypotheses are assessed using LMM (Heck et al., 2013) to handle the multilevel nature of our dataset. Next, we discuss the theoretical implications of our findings.

1.6.1. The key role of creativity in transforming passion into value-based selling behaviors

The initial process combines salespeople's harmonious passion and creativity to predict value-based sales behaviors. Creativity literature states that individuals are the most creative when they feel motivated about the work itself and that passion is a strong

antecedent to creativity (Amabile, 1996; Amabile & Fisher, 2009). We join previous scholars and posit that harmonious passion captures the extremely positive emotions and meaning people derive from work (Cardon et al., 2009; Crawford et al., 2022; Vallerand et al., 2003). Finally, we bring value-based selling behaviors to retail sales and suggest that creativity mediates the effect of passion on value-based selling behaviors, which are particularly desirable in the specialty retail industry. In H1, we find that creativity mediates harmonious passion effect on value-based selling behaviors. We conclude that highly creative individuals fueled by harmonious passion achieve the highest levels of value-based selling behaviors. This result is important because managing creativity is often considered a paradox (Townley & Beech, 2010), and store managers might not be well-equipped for the task. Insights on the matter are discussed in the managerial implications section.

1.6.2. The creativity-based process leading to value-based selling behaviors and sales performance

The second process suggests that creativity can be channeled into value-based selling behaviors, which, in turn, positively affect sales performance. The positive relationship between value-based selling behaviors and sales performance is well-documented (Terho et al., 2015). However, we know little about creativity as an antecedent to value-based selling behaviors, and the theoretical foundation of creativity is in the context of sales. The present research stands out by bringing creativity theories to explain how salespeople can leverage value-based selling behaviors in specialty retail settings and generate greater sales performances as evaluated by store managers.

The present study contrasts with previous research accounts by bringing value-based selling behaviors to B2C sales. It's the specificity of small specialty retailers that

grants us this inclusion. Small specialty retailers differ from mass merchandisers, department stores, warehouse clubs, and supercenters by focusing on a specialized line of goods (e.g., art supplies, photography equipment, beer-making supplies). Successful small specialty retailers tend to bank on an experienced and knowledgeable workforce to champion a differentiation-focus strategy (DellaCamera, 2022). To better understand how the VBSB takes place in retail settings, we propose the following scenario:

A customer visits an outdoor sports retail store to prepare for their first fly-fishing expedition in the northern Canadian region. With no prior experience and a desire to avoid substantial investments, the customer will likely seek assistance from a salesperson. This is where the value-based selling process comes into play. The salesperson engages in a conversation with the customer, posing questions to understand their objectives better. Subsequently, the salesperson curates a selection of products tailored to the customer's specific needs. Throughout this process, the salesperson imparts information about the value of each item and addresses any concerns expressed by the customer. Finally, the salesperson reviews the proposed solution with the customer, emphasizing the value it provides, and ensures that the customer's initial goals have been fulfilled.

Similarly, our data were collected in a retail chain that specializes in art supplies. We validate the relevance of value-based selling behaviors in B2C settings by relying on store manager-level evaluation of sales performance outcomes. This is possible because our unique database matches store managers' evaluation of sales performances to their respective employees. In addition, to support our mediated process, this data structure provides empirical evidence of the value of promoting value-based selling behaviors in

specialty retail settings. In H2, the results indicate that value-based selling behaviors mediate the effect of creativity on sales performances. Creativity alone is not enough to predict sales performance. Small specialty retailers' sales performances can be improved by leveraging salespeople's value-based selling behaviors.

1.6.3. The moderating roles of the store manager's job engagement and the salespeople's organizational commitment

Our results suggest that the relationship between creativity and value-based selling behaviors is richer than we expected. Consistent with Amabile's work stressing the roles of social environment and intrinsic motivation in influencing one's creativity (Amabile, 1996), we explore the moderating roles of the salespeople's organizational commitment and the store manager's job engagement. In terms of main effects, we find that both variables individually reveal nonsignificant effects on value-based selling behaviors. However, when our moderators interact with creativity, the store manager's job engagement amplifies value-based selling behaviors while the salespeople's organizational commitment impedes value-based selling behaviors. H3 is validated; however, we don't find support for H4.

Our results reveal that the store manager's job engagement positively moderates the relationship between creativity and value-based selling behaviors. Specifically, the slope of the relationship between creativity and value-based selling behaviors becomes steeper at higher levels of store manager job engagement, indicating that the positive effect of creativity is significantly amplified when the store manager is highly engaged. This finding suggests that a highly engaged store manager signals desirable work conditions, enhancing the transition from creativity to value-based selling behaviors. The highest value-based selling behaviors occur in highly creative individuals under store

managers with high engagement. At the same time, the effect is less pronounced for individuals low in creativity, resulting in flatter slopes. Our unique dyadic data set supports Rich et al. (2010) conceptualization, highlighting engagement as a crucial mechanism linking individual creativity and managerial influence to job performance.

While our literature review provides favorable accounts for organizational commitment's positive effect on creativity, our results tell a different story. These findings compel us to revisit the relevant literature and adopt a more comprehensive approach to examining the drivers of organizational commitment. We find the positive influences of centralization (Bateman & Strasser, 1984), organizational structure (Sommer et al., 1996), formalization (Michaels et al., 1988), group cohesiveness, leader-initiated structure (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), and a negative effect for role ambiguity and role conflict (Boshoff & Mels, 1995; Johnston et al., 1990). Intuitively, these antecedents expose the conservative, conformist, complying, and predictive nature of organizational commitment, which appears to be inconsistent with a favorable creative environment characterized by challenges, autonomy, the absence of organizational impediments, and the diversity of skills at stake (Amabile & Fisher, 2009). We associate high levels of a tendency to adhere to established ways of doing things, limiting opportunities for creativity. Salespeople strongly committed to the organization may feel pressured to conform to existing structures, avoid deviating from established norms, and prefer to lean toward the status quo. To the best of our knowledge, few studies offer compelling evidence of the detrimental effect of organizational commitment on creativity. Our findings in H4 address this gap in the literature and provide empirical evidence that salespeople with high levels of organizational commitment are more likely to hinder the

creative process, resulting in less favorable sales behaviors and ultimately leading to lower sales performance. These results contribute to sales management literature by highlighting the dark side of emphasizing the importance of the salespeople's organizational commitment when it comes to highly creative salespeople.

1.6.4. The interaction between the store manager's job engagement and the salespeople's organizational commitment

Our last two hypotheses (H5a,b) deal with the three-way interaction between the store manager's job engagement and the employee's organizational commitment and creativity. Our results confirm our previous findings and uncover that the highest levels of value-based selling behaviors are associated with highly creative individuals, low in organizational commitment, and working under a store manager high in job engagement. For individuals low in creativity, organizational commitment has very little effect on value-based selling behaviors, and the store manager's job engagement has virtually no impact. From a Social Exchange Theory point of view, we would expect that salespeople high in organizational commitment would be more likely to initiate behaviors involving considerable effort on behalf of the organization in anticipation of a reward (e.g., manager's support through engagement; Brown, 1996). However, our empirical results do not confirm this relationship. To shed light on the potential negative aspects of organizational commitment, we must redirect our focus toward research that investigates the impact of organizational commitment on job performance rather than solely examining desirable sales behaviors as outcome variables. We find that sales literature provides mixed results regarding the effect of organizational commitment on job performance and suggests a negative or nonsignificant effect in a retail context (Jaramillo et al., 2005; Leong et al., 1994).

On the other hand, organizational commitment has been found to predict salespeople's attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes, including performance (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990 for meta-analyses). We contribute to sales literature by addressing this conflict and providing empirical evidence that organizational commitment is not contributing to creative outcomes (i.e., value-based selling behaviors). This is due to the rigid nature of organizational commitment, where the extra effort directed toward achieving organizational goals impedes the freedom required for creativity to mature into desirable sales behaviors. Finally, for individuals lacking in creative abilities, we find that organizational commitment and the store manager's job engagement have little to no impact on value-based selling behaviors. These results are timely as the retail industry is now characterized by high turnover, recruitment problems, generational stigma, and "quiet quitting" trends that could all be correlated to lower employee organizational commitment. Considering our results, even if an employee is low in organizational commitment, the store manager could encourage and support salespeople to develop their creative side, which impacts their sales performance, instead of trying to reinforce their organizational commitment. In simple terms, when it comes to small specialty retailers, the combination of the salespeople's creativity and the store managers' job engagement drives sales results. Still, the organizational commitment of salespeople plays no role in it.

1.6.5. Implications for small specialty retailers and marketers

The crucial role of creativity (H1) Small specialty retailers differentiate themselves through their niche focus, expertise, passionate workforce, and personalized customer experience, which are harder to find in big-box stores. Salespeople play a crucial role in the sales process by engaging with customers, communicating the value based on

in-depth knowledge of their products, and helping customers make informed purchasing decisions. However, attracting, retaining, and developing skilled employees remain colossal challenges for retailers. Fortunately, our research highlights the central role of creativity in enabling sales approaches that lead to greater sales performances. For small specialty retailers, creativity shall be at the forefront of employee skills valued by the employer during the hiring process, orientation, and development of salespeople. The good news is that salespeople's creativity can be nurtured by providing a positive social environment (Amabile, 1996) and by implementing, often, simple initiatives. For example, one strategy could involve cultivating an organizational culture that places a high value on creativity, inspires employees, and promotes autonomy and a sense of control. This can be achieved by encouraging collaboration and diversity, allocating dedicated time for creative endeavors, providing training and development opportunities, celebrating new ideas, and rewarding creativity. Additionally, creating a culture that constructively challenges ideas, emphasizes intrinsic motivators (i.e., harmonious passion), encourages risk-taking and learning from failures, nurtures a curiosity-driven mindset, and provides a stimulating workspace can also be effective.

When looking at the proposed antecedents of creativity, we find that individuals characterized by high levels of harmonious passion are likelier to invest time and effort in their work, think creatively, and go the extra mile. What is particularly useful for small specialty retailers is that harmonious passion can be fostered in ways that are very similar to creativity. For instance, employers can introduce or reinforce existing policies that include communicating the firms' vision and goals, aligning salespeople's interests and strengths, providing purposeful work, encouraging self-reflection, providing growth

opportunities, recognizing and celebrating passion, allowing experimentation and autonomy, and promoting a healthy work-life balance.

The value-based selling behaviors process (H2) Building on our creativity-fueled process depicted in H2, we suggest that value-based selling behaviors are particularly relevant and desirable to elevate sales performance in retail. We advocate for a value-based selling process that focuses on recognizing the customer's needs and demonstrating how the product or service can uniquely address those needs by articulating tangible value and outcomes to the customer. The process shall emphasize building a trusted relationship, delivering customized solutions, and showcasing the long-term benefits of the product or service. Our results contrast with previous value-based selling behaviors literature limited to the B2B context and suggest that small specialty retailers adopt such an approach considering the plurality of industry challenges. Learning and developing value-based selling behaviors requires combining knowledge, skills, and practice. Operators can offer professional development emphasizing a customer-centric mindset, role-play activities, communication and listening skills development, brainstorming, synectics, creative problem-solving, and product/service-specific training. Additionally, operators can contribute to a culture of mentorship and coaching and finally seek customers' feedback on their experience with value-based selling behaviors.

The interaction between the employee's organizational commitment and the store manager's job engagement (H3-H5) An important implication refers to the manager's role in developing value-based selling behaviors. While we previously emphasized tactics that operators can implement, it is also essential to consider the role of the store manager. Our study expands on prior research showing how salespeople's

passion is a motivating factor (Crawford et al., 2022). We extend this investigation by exploring the interaction between the salespeople's organizational commitment, the store manager's job engagement, and the salespeople's creativity, and we reinforce the finding that while passion is related to engagement and organizational commitment, it is also distinct from them.

Surprisingly, we learn that creative salespeople low on organizational commitment but working under a store manager high in job engagement generate the highest sales performance evaluations. This finding is fascinating in a context where frontline retail employees are often stigmatized and branded by a lack of initiative, withdrawal of collaboration, emotional detachment, increased absenteeism, limited communication, and reduced productivity. The good news is that even if salespeople lack organizational commitment, if they are provided with the proper work environment to develop and act on their creativity, such salespeople are in the best position to embrace value-based selling behaviors and, in turn, achieve the best sales performances. Our study demonstrates that the store manager's job engagement is a key contributor to such a work environment. For a salesperson, it is essential to know that the supervisor is engaged in their work to ensure a sense of support, particularly when it comes to creative work. Otherwise, they may perceive that their manager lacks investment in the exchange relationship. In return for the supervisor's support, the salesperson experiences a positive and supportive environment conducive to creativity and is likelier to engage in value-based selling behaviors, leading to greater sales performances. Creativity literature suggests that managers should create a supportive work environment and hire and develop employees demonstrating high levels of creativity to stimulate creative productivity (Amabile &

Fisher, 2009). Small specialty retailers can rely on strategies to develop a store manager's job engagement, including clear expectations and goals, autonomy, decision-making authority, growth opportunities, a respectful and inclusive work environment, teamwork, regular communication and feedback, and access to mentorship. Moreover, we suggest training that teaches managers how to handle creative and passionate individuals (i.e., entrepreneurship and innovation management training programs).

1.6.6. Limitations and future research

The present research involves a series of limitations. First, passion and creativity are often portrayed as unlimited resources. Cross-sectional studies can potentially provide valuable insights into the relationship between our variables. However, they may not fully capture the causal inferences or account for factors that contribute to the gradual depletion of these resources over time. Temporal dynamics or changes in variables over time might be necessary for further understanding the relationship between passion, creativity, value-based selling behaviors, and sales performances. We invite additional research to replicate our findings using a longitudinal design, especially tracking passion and creativity over time to provide a clearer understanding of our proposed process.

Second, our sample could be deemed highly favorable to find individuals strongly inclined toward creativity. Nevertheless, our findings should not be constrained to arts and supply retail. During the discussion, our retrospective analysis illuminated the theoretical implications of our findings. It revealed their alignment with previous research, substantiating our empirical results regardless of the retail sector. To reinforce this point, we invite future research to investigate the relationship between our proposed variables in different retail sectors, industries, and organization sizes that might be less favorable to creativity.

Third, the findings of this study diverge from previous research that supports the positive effect of organizational commitment on job performance, thereby prompting valuable discussions regarding the generalizability and broader implications of the current findings. Independent replication studies using different samples and methodologies would reinforce the findings and establish their robustness. Accumulating results from multiple studies through a meta-analysis would also provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between creativity and organizational commitment. It would also help identify potential moderating factors or boundary conditions.

Fourth, the current study does not extensively investigate the potential negative consequences or challenges associated with creativity in the workplace. Investigating the dark side of creativity, such as the impact on work-life balance, conflicts with colleagues or supervisors, burnout, privileges, and power dynamics, would provide a more holistic understanding of the effect of creativity on job performances (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa & McCrae, 2008; Zhou & George, 2001). We invite future research to explore mediating and moderating variables and how individuals balance the various aspects of their jobs.

Fifth, despite our effort to develop an encompassing model, the present research does not extensively investigate the individual factors contributing to value-based selling behaviors. Understanding these antecedents would provide insights into how organizations can foster a favorable work environment. Examining personal traits, cognitive processes, and psychological factors that influence value-based selling behaviors, such as self-efficacy or additional intrinsic motivators, would enhance our understanding of the individual's antecedents. Moreover, we invite future research to

investigate the influence of social factors (e.g., leadership styles) and environmental factors (e.g., organizational culture, union, resource availability) on value-based selling behaviors, which would help identify strategies for sales performance outcomes. Finally, we consciously kept the customer perspective out of our model to focus on employee-manager relationships. Future research could explore outcomes related to customer satisfaction and patronage.

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1.8. Appendix

1.8.1. Scale items and psychometric properties

Harmonious passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) $\alpha = .92$, CR = .92, AVE = .67

1. This activity allows me to live a variety of experiences.
2. The new things that I discover with this activity allow me to appreciate it even more.
3. This activity allows me to live memorable experiences.
4. This activity reflects the qualities I like about myself.
5. This activity is in harmony with the other activities in my life.
6. For me it is a passion, that I still manage to control.

Creativity (Lussier et al., 2017) $\alpha = .91$, CR = .91, AVE = .67

1. I suggest new ways to achieve goals or objectives.
2. I come up with new and practical ideas to improve sales performance.
3. I exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity to.
4. I have new and innovative ideas.
5. I come up with creative solutions to problems.

Value-based selling behaviors (Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih, 2018) $\alpha = .89$, CR = .89, AVE = .73

1. I have the ability to offer good product/service for the price.
2. I have the ability to articulate a product/service worth in time, effort, and money.
3. I have the ability to make customer's feeling of getting his/her money's worth.

Job engagement (Rich et al., 2010) $\alpha = .79$, CR = .83, AVE = .62

1. I put in a lot of effort at work.
2. I am passionate about my work.
3. I am focused on my work tasks.

Organizational commitment (Deconinck & Johnson, 2009) $\alpha = .82$, CR = .80, AVE = .46

1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization.
2. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
3. I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization.
4. I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization.
5. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
6. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.

Sales performance (Lussier et al., 2021; Martin & Bush, 2006) $\alpha = .90$, CR = .91, AVE = .68

1. This salesperson has a good overall work attitude.
2. This salesperson is effective at solving problems.
3. This salesperson has a good overall job performance.
4. This salesperson has a good selling ability.
5. This salesperson reaches overall sales objectives.

Empowerment (Martin & Bush, 2006) $\alpha = .62$, CR = .62, AVE = .38

1. The work I do is very important to me.
2. I can decide for myself how to do my job.
3. I master the skills necessary for my work.
4. I have a significant influence on what happens in my department.

Intrinsic motivation (Mallin et al., 2022) $\alpha = .76$, CR = .77, AVE = .53

1. I feel a sense of personal growth and development in my work.
2. I sell because of the feeling of performing a useful service.
3. When I perform well, I know it's because of my own desire to achieve.

Role overload (Schaubroeck et al., 1989) $\alpha = .93$, CR = .93, AVE = .82

1. The amount of work I am being asked to do is too much.
2. It seems like I never have enough time to do what I need to do at work.
3. I often feel like I have too much work for one person.

Adaptive selling behaviors (Lussier et al., 2017) $\alpha = .92$, CR = .92, AVE = .71

1. I can easily use a wide variety of selling approaches.
2. I vary my sales styles from situation to situation.
3. Basically, I use different approaches with most customers.
4. I am very flexible in the sales approach I use.
5. I try to understand how one customer differs from another.

Customer-oriented behaviors (Mullins et al., 2020) $\alpha = .90$, CR = .90, AVE = .75

1. I try to help customers achieve their goals.
2. I keep the customer's best interests in mind.
3. I take a problem-solving approach with customers.

2. Chapter 2

The Influence of Salespeople's Characteristics and Managerial Empathy on Sales Performance

Abstract

Building upon prior research, this study explores the dynamics between managerial empathy, salespeople characteristics, and their collective impact on passion and creativity in retail settings. Using survey data from 271 store manager-salespeople dyads in an art and supply chain, results support the core process linking salespeople harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors, but not their effect on sales performance as measured. Salespeople's organizational commitment, empowerment, and job engagement predict harmonious passion, not extraversion or role overload. Managerial empathy interacts with salespeople's extraversion and role overload, with implications suggesting it does not compensate for the lack of employee extraversion. Additionally, high role overload under empathetic managers fosters passion, while low role overload with overly empathetic managers impedes it. The findings offer insights into theory and practice.

2.1. Introduction

As part of a broader research initiative examining the positive influence of passion and creativity on sales performance, this second essay aims to replicate previous findings (Boissonneault, 2024) while exploring predictors of harmonious passion and creativity in small specialty retailers. The small specialty retail industry in North America comprises retailers specializing in various goods such as kitchenware, art supplies, sporting goods, collectibles, clothing, and jewelry, excluding mass merchandisers, department stores,

grocery stores, warehouse clubs, and supercenters. This vital industry faces challenges, including a mature life cycle, limited growth prospects, fierce competition from retail giants, a shrunken labor force, and rising operation and product costs accelerated by inflation (IBISWorld, 2023). Despite increased foot traffic following the pandemic, these challenges have constrained bottom-line growth. In light of such circumstances, we offer insights into how operators can explore short-to-medium-term solutions and leverage the potential of a passionate and creative workforce.

Previous research has underscored the pivotal role of employee creativity in enhancing sales performance (Lussier et al., 2017; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). This body of work also acknowledges domain-relevant knowledge, emotional intelligence, and managerial feedback as predictive factors of performance in sales contexts (Agnihotri et al., 2014; Lask & Shepherd, 2013). While managerial feedback is valuable, it offers only a limited perspective of organizational support. Additionally, we expect salespeople to be motivated by a broader array of contextual factors, including role overload and empowerment, as well as workplace engagement factors, such as organizational commitment and job engagement. These specific determinants, identified through our theoretical development, emerge as pivotal drivers of employee passion, creativity, and performance. This rationale justifies our deliberate effort to consolidate them within the same model, as they collectively play a crucial role in shaping and enhancing sales performance within the retail industry. Yet, the interaction of these individual characteristics with higher-level variables on sales performance remains under-researched. Addressing these issues, we offer a holistic vision of the manager's impact on enhancing these different factors and propose to explore the distinct effect of store

manager empathy, which entails acknowledging salespeople's emotions and cultivating a culture of trust and support (Agnihotri & Krush, 2015). Very limited research explored managerial empathy alongside employees' passion and creativity. Moreover, we know little about how these dispositions are converted into desirable sales behaviors. Our research offers a new perspective as the small specialty retailers' context provides ground to explore sales approaches that have traditionally been exclusively studied in B2B settings. Consequently, we examine *how salespeople's individual characteristics and interactions with managerial empathy per store influence sales performance through harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors*.

To predict salespeople's passion and creativity, we propose a dyadic and time-lag framework that incorporates salespeople-specific predictors, a store-level variable (i.e., manager's empathy per store), and our *core process* involving the salespeople's harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors (Figure 3.1). In developing this framework, we draw upon established theories, including the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) and the Intrinsic Motivation of Creativity Theory (Amabile, 1996). The former suggests that when individuals experience harmonious passion for their work, they are more likely to experience high levels of well-being, engagement, satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and creativity. The latter suggests that a high level of intrinsic motivation can lead to deep concentration, immersion, and higher levels of persistence, exploration, and risk-taking, which are essential for generating novel and innovative ideas. Finally, to support the interactions between individual predictors and the store manager's empathy, we rely on the Social Exchange Theory (Emerson, 1976) and its concept of reciprocity to explain the proposed relationships.

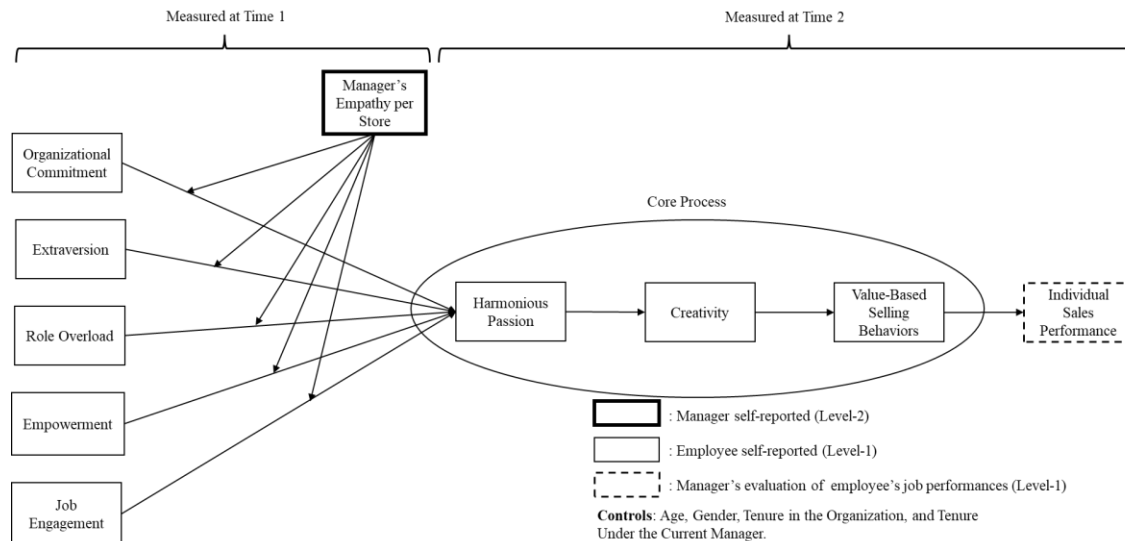


Fig. 3.1- Conceptual framework

Our research offers original contributions to theory in three different ways. Firstly, we replicate the work of the first essay (Boissonneault, 2024) and measure the effects of the core process on sales performance as evaluated by the store manager. By confirming this link, we aim to provide theoretical and empirical support for value-based selling as a suitable approach in retail settings while measuring the anticipated positive effect of harmonious passion and creativity on sales performances. Secondly, we examine the role of salespeople's characteristics, including organizational commitment, extraversion, role overload, empowerment, and job engagement, in predicting salespeople's passion and creativity. This original framework contributes to the existing literature by providing a broader array of predicting variables that find support in both theory and practice. Thirdly, research based on surveys generally relies on self-perceived measures provided by individual respondents (Hulland et al., 2018). These tend to reflect the implicit beliefs of respondents rather than accurately depicting the relationships under examination (Podsakoff et al., 2003), leading to notable concerns about common-method bias (Hulland

et al., 2018). To address this concern, we explore the multi-level relationships between the manager's empathy at the store level (Level 2) and the proposed predictors at the employee level (Level 1). We aim to identify optimal combinations that enable harmonious passion and creativity while avoiding potential negative consequences.

2.2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Our approach to developing hypotheses reflects our commitment to systematically explore the relationships between critical variables within our proposed model. We initially propose a serial mediation effect, acknowledging the sequential nature of harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors, framing them as components of a core process that influences sales performance, all measured at Time 2. This hypothesis sets the stage for understanding the indirect pathways through which our proposed predicting variables impact sales performances. Subsequently, we establish direct effects between individual factors (organizational commitment, extraversion, role overload, empowerment, and job engagement) measured at Time 1 and harmonious passion measured at Time 2, recognizing their significance as predictors of this critical construct. Leveraging these direct effects, we extend our analysis to explore the serial mediation pathways linking these predictors measured at Time 1 to sales performance through the core process measured at Time 2. Finally, we include the role of the store manager's empathy measured at Time 1 and explore the moderation effects between each individual-level predictor in shaping harmonious passion measured at Time 2. Table 3.1 summarizes the corresponding hypotheses.

Table 3.1 – Detailed hypothesis list

Serial Mediation Effect (Core Process; Level-1)	
H1	The salespeople’s harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors, hereafter referred to as the core process, have a sequential indirect positive effect (i.e., harmonious passion → creativity → value-based selling behaviors) on sales performances as evaluated by the store manager (all measured at Time 2).
Direct Effects (Level-1)	
H2 _a	The salespeople’s organizational commitment at Time 1 is positively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion at Time 2.
H2 _b	The salespeople’s extraversion at Time 1 is positively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion at Time 2.
H2 _c	The salespeople’s role overload at Time 1 is negatively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion at Time 2.
H2 _d	The salespeople’s empowerment at Time 1 is positively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion at Time 2.
H2 _e	The salespeople’s job engagement at Time 1 is positively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion at Time 2.
Serial Mediation Effects (Level-1)	
H3 _{a-e}	The indirect effect of the salespeople’s (a) employee organizational commitment, (b) extraversion, (c) role overload, (d) empowerment, and (e) job engagement at Time 1 on sales performances at Time 2 through the core process at Time 2 is positive (negative for [c] role overload) and significant.
Moderation Effects (Level-1 & -2)	
H4 _{a-e}	The interaction between manager empathy per store and (a) salespeople’s organizational commitment, (b) extraversion, (c) role overload, (d) empowerment, and (e) job engagement at Time 1 positively predicts the salespeople's level of harmonious passion at Time 2, with a stronger effect of (a), (b), (c), (d), and (e) on harmonious passion expected when the store managers display greater empathy.

2.2.1. Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (Emerson, 1976), a well-established theory in organizational behavior literature (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), has been frequently applied in sales research (Lussier & Hall, 2018; Ping, 2007). The scope condition of this theoretical framework is that social exchanges involve actions contingent on rewarding reactions from others (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). The common assumption is that “a

resource will continue to flow only if there is a valued return contingent upon it” (Emerson, 1976, p. 359). The resource is an ability or attribute within the relationship between two actors, and the contingency is called “reinforcement” (Emerson, 1976). Building on previous research (Cropanzano et al., 2001), we adopt dyads as the recommended unit of analysis, leveraging the interactive nature of Social Exchange Theory. Accordingly, we propose that the store manager’s empathy plays a reinforcing role and that salespeople’s organizational commitment, empowerment, and job engagement are attributes of the relationship between the store manager and the salesperson. Subordinates perceive the store manager’s empathy favorably. Managers’ empathy interacts with salespeople’s capabilities and working conditions to stimulate or inhibit creativity and its antecedents, harmonious passion, consequently enhancing or diminishing sales performance. Given its true interactionist nature, in contrast to frameworks often utilized in the field, such as conservation of resources theory, job demands-resources theory, expectancy theory, or the ability-motivation-opportunity framework, which typically adopt a unidirectional perspective, we assert that Social Exchange Theory provides a robust foundation for explaining the exchange relationships portrayed in our dyadic model. In the present work, Social Exchange Theory serves as the guiding principle for the hypotheses involving the interaction between the store manager’s empathy and harmonious passion antecedents (H4_{a-e}), as it captures the reciprocal nature of exchanges between individuals, aligning closely with our theoretical groundings and the dyadic structure of our data. Additionally, our theoretical foundation draws on the Dualistic Model of Passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) and the Intrinsic Motivation of Creativity Theory (Amabile, 1996), both described in the following sections, to further

support the remaining hypotheses (H1, H2_{a-e}, and H3_{a-e}). Next, we develop our hypotheses by integrating these theories and extensive literature on passion, creativity, and sales performance.

2.2.2. Harmonious passion in predicting salespeople's creativity

Vallerand et al. define *passion* as a “strong inclination toward an activity that people like that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (2003, p. 756). The authors differentiate between two types of passion, which stem from how an activity integrates into one’s sense of self. Obsessive passion arises from internalizing external demands, such as the need for social approval. Conversely, harmonious passion emerges when the activity is autonomously integrated into one’s identity without external influences. Our research focuses on the latter. The theorization of the construct guides this choice. First, previous research has demonstrated that harmonious passion leads to more positive and fewer negative emotions than obsessive passion at work (Philippe et al., 2010). This is because autonomously internalizing the activity allows for more flexible behavioral engagement. This flexible engagement facilitates better concentration and positive emotional experiences (Pollack et al., 2020), which we argue are both drivers of creative outputs. In contrast, obsessive passion, which stems from controlled internalization, relates to a compulsion to engage in the activity, resulting in a more rigid and conflicted form of engagement. This pressured engagement hinders complete focus on the task and diminishes the typical positive outcomes (Vallerand et al., 2003). Second, the shared assumption among passion scholars is that obsessive passion is a non-desirable motivational force that leads to maladaptive outcomes such as “higher ill-being, negative cognition, non-integrated motivation, and activity dependence” (Curran et al., 2015, p. 651), which we recognize as responses beyond the scope of the present research effort.

Finally, studying harmonious passion independently of its counterpart is not uncommon. Particularly relevant to the conversation is the example of Liu et al.'s work (2011), which provides empirical evidence of harmonious passion mediating and combining effects with autonomy support from different levels (unit/branch, team) and individual autonomy orientation in predicting individual creativity while excluding the obsessive counterpart from the proposed model.

Previous research in sales has explored the predictive roles of various factors, such as salespeople's knowledge, emotional intelligence, and manager feedback on service salespeople's creativity (Agnihotri et al., 2014). The present study significantly advances this ongoing conversation by exploring additional antecedents and providing theoretical and empirical evidence of the processes that enable creativity in retail. Drawing on the Intrinsic Motivation Principle of Creativity proposed by Amabile and Fisher (2009), which suggests that individuals are most creative when motivated by intrinsic factors such as interest, enjoyment, satisfaction, and challenge rather than external pressures, we aim to explore the role of intrinsic motivation, particularly in the form of passion. The same authors argue that intrinsic motivation reaches its highest form in passion. Hence, we focus on harmonious passion, which aligns with Amabile's conceptualization of motivation that is not externally driven, contrasting with its obsessive passion counterpart (Vallerand et al., 2003). Thus, we operationalize Amabile's concept of intrinsic motivation as harmonious passion in our theoretical and hypotheses development.

Regarding performance attainment, harmonious passion is considered a reliable predictor as the individual dedication to the activity helps them overcome obstacles, face difficulties or opposition, and eventually attain performance (Vallerand et al., 2007).

Surprisingly, passion in sales literature remains understudied despite the numerous obstacles, rejections, and resistance typically associated with the sales process. Although recent studies in sales research have investigated passion as a dimension of grit, alongside perseverance and long-term goal orientation, the findings revealing the dual nature of grit in the sales context (Dugan et al., 2019; Lussier et al., 2021) suggesting a need to study passion on its own. Moreover, service research raised the pressing need to examine what organization-level actions can facilitate positive passion-related outcomes (Crawford et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2011). The present work aims to clarify these questions.

2.2.3. Creativity in sales

In her foundational work, Amabile defines *creativity* as “[a] product or response will be judged as creative to the extent that [...] it is both a novel and appropriate, useful, correct or valuable response to the task at hand” (1996, p. 35). Building upon this conceptualization, we contend that the creative “product” is driven by an intrinsic motivational force manifested as passion. Specifically, we expect harmonious passion to be associated with positive emotions, such as feeling inspired and positively excited (St-Louis & Vallerand, 2015), which, in turn, instills a sense of relevance to the organization and fosters positive attitudes toward engaging in creative activities (Cardon, 2008).

In practice, creativity emerges through generating innovative and valuable ideas or solutions at every stage of the sales process, including prospecting and objection handling. Creativity enables salespeople to approach sales tasks with a fresh perspective. For example, salespeople’s creativity becomes apparent when using imaginative approaches to convey product information, engaging customers with storytelling, humor, imaged examples, personalized messages, strategies capturing attention, evoking emotions, and ultimately influencing their decision-making. Creativity is found to

improve both service behavior and sales performance (Groza et al., 2016; Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). Previous sales research supports the relevance of exploring the relationship between salespeople's creativity and sales performances (Agnihotri et al., 2014; Lask & Shepherd, 2013; Lussier et al., 2017; Wang & Miao, 2015). While this stream of research offers evidence of creativity antecedents (e.g., emotional intelligence, market orientation, domain-relevant knowledge), it provides very little on the mechanism enabling salespeople's creativity while being at the core of their proposed models.

Additionally, this line of research suggests the potential for uncovering positive relationships between higher-level factors and the processes that lead to creativity. For instance, researchers call for further investigating control forces in managing the sales force (Wang & Miao, 2015), evoke the need to explore dyadic data between sales managers and salespeople (Lask & Shepherd, 2013), and suggest to examine further salespeople's creativity-enabling environment (Agnihotri et al., 2014). By exploring the interactions between individual-level predictor, store-level moderator, and harmonious passion and their effects on salespeople's creativity, our research aims to contribute to the service and retail literature by addressing these important gaps.

2.2.4. Value-based selling behaviors in retail

Value-based selling behaviors refer to “the salesperson's efforts to advance customer value-in-use jointly with the customer by demonstrating the vendor's contribution to customer business profitability in monetary terms” (Terho et al., 2017, p. 43). This sales approach comprises three components: understanding the customer's business model, crafting the value proposition, and communicating customer value (Terho et al., 2012). While acknowledging the B2B origins of this sales approach, we assert that its associated behaviors are transferable to B2C retail contexts. Transitioning a B2B

concept into the B2C realm for the first time necessitates justification. Among the three defining components that Terho et al. (2012) proposed, only the first appears inherently exclusive to business settings. While a business model generally outlines how a company creates, delivers, and captures value, we suggest that Terho's first dimension can be adapted to reflect a retail perspective, where customers assess whether a product offers excellent value for its price. This entails acknowledging that a product is valuable in terms of time, effort, and money, influencing customers to recognize the product's worth (Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih, 2018), which is consistent with the literature on service value (Ruiz et al., 2008). Building on Terho et al.'s (2012) contribution, later work defined value-based selling as "a sales approach that builds on identification, quantification, communication, and verification of customer value" (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015, p. 101). This description offers a more encompassing definition that can be adapted to salespeople in retail settings while remaining coherent with our operationalization of the construct.

At its core, value-based selling prioritizes identifying and fulfilling customer needs, preferences, and expectations by offering solutions that provide tangible benefits and outcomes (Terho et al., 2012, 2015). This sales approach focuses on crafting and communicating value propositions that strike a chord with customers, offering significant potential to enhance the customer's bottom line through either cost savings or performance improvements (Terho et al., 2015). For the reader's benefit, Table 3.2 provides a brief overview of common sales approaches in the sales literature. In contrast to the conventional sales orientation approach, which prioritizes closing sales through a persuasive and transactional communication style, the value-based orientation emphasizes product benefits, informative and solution-oriented communications, and

addressing customers' concerns by proposing value-added solutions (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). In Appendix 1.9.1, we offer a scenario-based example in a retail setting. While the associated sales process is well-defined, previous research accounts have not explored the essential determinants at the individual and organizational levels of value-based selling behaviors and provided explanations on how they interact to explain its adoption.

We build on the value creation idea inherent in value-based selling literature to address this gap. For instance, Terho et al. state that salespeople who practice value-based selling behaviors “adopt proactive, value co-creator roles and strive to influence the customer’s value creation process and therefore the emergence of value-in-use” (Terho et al., 2017, p. 44). Similarly, Ferdinand and Wahyuningsih propose a convincing link between salespeople’s innovativeness characterized by creativity and value-based selling behaviors in achieving sales performances, stating that “[a] person who is an out-of-the-box doer has the potential to develop new and unexpected sales methods and because of his creativity, he has the potential to develop several different methods for solving the same problem” (2018, p. 971). While researchers acknowledge the crucial role of creativity in value-based selling behaviors, the creative process involved remains understudied. Accordingly, studying value-based selling behaviors in a B2C context and investigating salespeople’s creativity as an essential driving force remains remarkably relevant to research and practice.

Table 3.2 – Overview of common sales approaches

Characteristics	Customer-oriented selling	Sales-oriented selling	Adaptive selling	Consultative selling	Relationship selling	Value-based selling behaviors
Key reference(s)	(Brown et al., 2002; Homburg et al., 2009; Saxe et al., 1982; Thomas et al., 2001)	(Boles et al., 2001; Jaramillo et al., 2007)	(Franke & Park, 2006; Park & Holloway, 2003; Weitz & Sujan, 1986)	(Liu & Leach, 2001)	(Beverland, 2001; Boles et al., 2000; Macintosh et al., 1992)	(Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih, 2018; Terho et al., 2015, 2017)
Definition	“[T]he degree to which salespeople practice the marketing concept by trying to help their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy customer needs.” (Saxe et al., 1982, p. 344)	“A sales orientation occurs when salespeople are primarily engaged in selling activities that emphasize ‘getting the sale’.” (Jaramillo et al., 2007, p. 303)	“The practice of adaptive selling is defined as the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation” (Weitz & Sujan, 1986, p. 62)	“Consultative selling is the process of professionally providing information for helping customers take intelligent actions to achieve their business objectives” (Liu & Leach, 2001, p. 147)	“An [exchange relationship] between parties involving long-term, highly committed relationships in the context of exchanges and outcomes that have occurred in the past and the expectations that exchanges between the parties will occur in the future” (Beverland, 2001)	“[T]he degree to which the salesperson works with the customer to craft a market offering in such a way that benefits are translated into monetary terms, based on an in-depth understanding of the customer's business model, thereby convincingly demonstrating their contribution to customers' profitability” (Terho et al., 2012, p. 178)
Market	Predominantly B2B	Traditionally B2C	B2B, B2C	B2B	B2B	B2B

Characteristics	Customer-oriented selling	Sales-oriented selling	Adaptive selling	Consultative selling	Relationship selling	Value-based selling behaviors
Focus	Trying to assist customers in making purchasing decisions that meet their needs (Homburg et al., 2009)	Meeting sales targets and maximizing revenue.	Adjustment of salespeople's selling behaviors to suit the characteristics of a specific sales encounter	Developing relationships based on trust	Building long-term relationships with customers	Understanding the customer's goal. Providing value and solutions to customer's problems (Terho et al., 2012)
Approach	Takes a problem-solving approach in selling products or services to customers (Thomas et al., 2001)	Offer product/service based on what the salesperson can convince customers to accept. Prioritizes closing sales	Use information gathered before and during an interaction to customize the content and format of the message.	Proactive communication by salespeople to facilitate the identification and solution of customer's problem	Balancing short-term performance-based behaviors with long-term relationship-building behaviors (Beverland, 2001)	Trust and credibility building. Value proposition communication (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015)
Goal	Long-term customer satisfaction and establishing mutually beneficial, long-term relationships (Saxe et al., 1982)	Maximize short-term sales gains by stimulating demand for products (Wachner et al., 2009)	Long-term customer satisfaction	Long-term. The salesperson acts as an advisor instead of promoting products.	Long-term relationships with profitable customers. Building trust and loyalty for repeat business and referrals (Boles et al., 2000; Koponen et al., 2019).	Long-term relationships. Transforming a firm's value proposition into sales performance
Strategy	Trying to influence the customer with information rather	Convincing customers to purchase product/service	Adopt minor adaptations in sales interactions, including	Develop trust and level of customer dependence, which provide a	Personalized interactions, ongoing support, and providing	Understanding the customer's goals and desired outcomes and

Characteristics	Customer-oriented selling	Sales-oriented selling	Adaptive selling	Consultative selling	Relationship selling	Value-based selling behaviors
	than pressure (Stock & Hoyer, 2005). Avoid high-pressure, deceptive or manipulative tactics (Thomas et al., 2001)		reactions to questions, comments, body language, and so on, to improve rapport and reduce objections.	barrier to switching.	value beyond the sale. Illustrating the vendor's impact on the customer's business profitability through explicit monetary terms (Terho et al., 2017)	tailoring the sales pitch to highlight how the product or service can meet those needs and deliver measurable value (Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih, 2018)
Communication style	Emphasizes the conversation skills necessary for gathering accurate information about customer needs. Low-pressure selling (Saxe et al., 1982)	Persuasive and transactional	Versatile and responsive to customer cues and objections	Salespeople must show a high degree of expertise	Consultative and relationship-oriented, prioritizing active listening and empathy.	Informative and solution-oriented
Key metrics	Customer satisfaction, willingness to pay	Individual sales performances, sales volume, conversion rates, revenue	Customer satisfaction, performance	Customer satisfaction	Customer satisfaction, retention rates, lifetime customer value, referrals generated, salesperson performance	Sales performance

2.2.5. Sales performances

In its original conceptualization, value-based selling behaviors imply outcomes focusing on the client's bottom line due to its B2B roots (e.g., client's profitability, performance enhancements, and cost savings; Terho et al., 2015). Yet, in its operationalization, sales performance emerges as the prominent outcome of value-based selling behaviors in empirical works (Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih, 2018; Mullins et al., 2020; Terho et al., 2012, 2015, 2017), or is at least suggested to be investigated further (Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). Consistent with these research accounts, we adopt sales performance as the dependent variable in the proposed model. While Terho's work relies on self-evaluation of sales performances (Terho et al., 2015, 2017), we join later work and rely on the managerial perspective (Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih, 2018; Mullins et al., 2020) to measure salespeople's sales performance, that is—salespeople's sales performances as evaluated by the store manager. Combining these three first constructs, we propose a core process composed of harmonious passion → creativity → value-based selling behaviors, and suggest its favorable impact on the salespeople's sales performance.

H1 The salespeople's harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors, hereafter referred to as the core process, have a sequential indirect positive effect (i.e., harmonious passion → creativity → value-based selling behaviors) on sales performances as evaluated by the store manager (all measured at Time 2).

2.2.6. Manager empathy at the store level (Level 2) as a moderator

We introduce our proposed moderator before the individual predictors of the core process because the managers' influence is intertwined with the proposed relationships

depicted in our hypotheses. In a critical review of organizational research on empathy, Clark et al. (2019) refer to *empathy* as a multidimensional construct involving understanding someone's thoughts (cognitive empathy), feeling someone's emotions (affective empathy), and showing understanding through behavior (behavioral empathy). Regardless of the dimension, empathy is strongly associated with prosocial behaviors (McNeely & Meglino, 1994), which is crucial within a social exchange framework. While we recognize that literature often studies these dimensions separately, for the scope of the present study, we adopt a unified conceptualization of empathy covering these three dimensions and providing a comprehensive approach to measuring empathic response. Accordingly, we treat empathy as a holistic construct encompassing a wide range of managerial competencies essential for fostering a positive manager-employee exchange relationship, especially in retail. We expect an empathic store manager to recognize salespeople's needs, concerns, and experiences, facilitating motivation, feedback, coaching, and support. This is consistent with the shared assumption among empathy scholars that empathy leads to an altruistic motivation to help (Batson & et al., 1981). Notably, we also find support within the service literature for the vital role of empathy in motivating individuals to help others within a social exchange perspective (Teng et al., 2012). Therefore, our focus on empathy contributes to the ongoing dialogue in sales regarding the impact of salespeople's empathy on sales performance (Agnihotri & Krush, 2015; Bagozzi, 2006), enriching the conversation by introducing the store manager's empathy paradigm.

Empathy, crucial for fostering prosocial behaviors within social exchanges, is a pivotal moderator between antecedents and harmonious passion rather than a direct

predictor of passion itself. Its relational significance underscores its potential to shape the interplay of factors in nurturing harmonious passion, reflecting its role in enhancing the quality of social exchange relationships and moderating the effects of dispositional factors on passion outcomes in the workplace.

Sales research has historically approached empathy from the salesperson's perspective and directed toward the customer (Agnihotri & Krush, 2015; McBane, 1995; Ngo et al., 2020). However, there's a notable gap in explaining how empathic managers influence salespeople's sales performance. Our study seeks to address this gap by highlighting the crucial role of empathy as a moderator in the manager-employee relationship. Empathy, inherently intertwined with interpersonal relationships, is commonly associated with prosocial choices in various social contexts and interpersonal transactions (Taylor et al., 2010). Consistent with this stream of research, we view empathy not merely as an antecedent but as a powerful moderator that shapes the dynamics with the proposed predictors in fostering harmonious passion. Thus, we operationalize empathy as a trait and anticipate that when store managers display empathy towards their salespeople, it triggers a cascade of cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes. Consistent with the Social Exchange Theory, empathic store managers foster a supportive environment, encouraging employees to express their passion and engage in creative thinking by actively listening, providing support, and demonstrating empathy. As a result, employees who feel understood and valued reciprocate this support with heightened motivation, leading to the emergence of harmonious passion and creativity. Conversely, less empathic store managers may suppress salespeople's passion and

creativity by cultivating a hostile work environment lacking emotional support and recognition, ultimately resulting in disengagement and demotivation among salespeople.

2.2.7. Organizational commitment

To explain the concept of *organizational commitment*, we reference Mowday et al.'s definition, emphasizing “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (1982, p.27). The emotional connection and identification fostered by a strong organizational commitment lead employees to feel a sense of belonging and devotion toward the organization. This connection is a motivational force that drives individuals to invest themselves wholeheartedly in their work. While passion at work and organizational commitment may seem closely related, research recognizes them as distinct constructs (Crawford et al., 2022). Job passion refers to one’s attitude toward the specific tasks and responsibilities of the job, whereas organizational commitment pertains to one’s attitude toward the overall organization (Ho et al., 2011). Our goal is not to compare the two concepts but to explore how their intricate relationship can enhance sales performance. Drawing upon the recognition of organizational commitment’s pivotal role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors in the sales context (Leong et al., 1994), we hypothesize that a more substantial organizational commitment among salespeople will significantly predict heightened levels of harmonious passion, triggering the proposed core process. While Leong et al. (1994) reaffirm that other factors may mediate the linkage between commitment and performance, we offer the proposed core process as the answer. This hypothesis is grounded in the idea that salespeople who feel deeply connected and committed to their organization are more likely to exhibit a passion for their work, manifest creative thinking, and actively embrace value-based selling behaviors. Consequently, we anticipate that

salespersons with stronger organizational commitment will demonstrate higher harmonious passion, leading to superior sales performance outcomes through the proposed core process.

H2a The salespeople's organizational commitment at Time 1 is positively associated with harmonious passion at Time 2.

H3a The indirect effect of the salespeople's organizational commitment at Time 1 on sales performances at Time 2 through the core process at Time 2 is positive and significant.

Organizational commitment is deeply rooted in Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that “perceived support generates greater commitment from employees, which then positively influences performance” (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 884). Relying on the reciprocity principle, the theory posits that goodwill gestures are reciprocated, yielding valued benefits that symbolize the quality of relationships (Mossholder et al., 2005). High-quality relational systems intertwine individuals within a network of relationships that can foster or hinder their commitment to the organization. When organizations provide support (e.g., managerial empathy), employees interpret it as a reward, prompting them to reciprocate this support by boosting their commitment to the organization (Deconinck & Johnson, 2009). We expect empathy to interact with organizational commitment in predicting harmonious passion, as empathy motivates individuals to invest in their work thoroughly. At the same time, creativity empowers them to generate innovative ideas and solutions, ultimately driving value-based selling behaviors and enhancing sales performance.

H4a The interaction between manager empathy per store and salespeople's organizational commitment at Time 1 positively predicts the salespeople's level of harmonious passion at Time 2, with a stronger effect of organizational commitment on harmonious passion expected when the store managers display greater empathy.

2.2.8. Extraversion

While organizational commitment relates to the intricate dynamics between employees and their organization, our second predictor stems from the widely acknowledged Big Five Inventory (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Extraversion has been consistently identified as one of the most relevant personality traits in sales contexts and has demonstrated strong predictive validity for sales performance in previous research (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Liao & Chuang, 2004; Neubert et al., 2006; Stewart, 1996; Verbeke et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2011). Hence, it is singled out as our study's primary personality trait of interest. Yet, extraversion is rarely adequately defined. Instead, researchers tend to introduce the construct using descriptive adjectives such as social, energetic, ambitious, outgoing, talkative, and enthusiastic (Barrick et al., 2001; Farrington, 2012; Steward et al., 2019). The American Psychological Association defines *extraversion* as “an orientation of one's interests and energies toward the outer world of people and things rather than the inner world of subjective experience” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018). This orientation predisposes extroverts to experience positive emotions and to foster positive interpersonal relationships (Judge et al., 2002; Philippe et al., 2010). Research suggests a strong association between extraversion and harmonious passion (Philippe et al., 2010), underscoring the pivotal role of extraversion as a precursor

to passion in the workplace. Our assumption that harmonious passion embodies a motivation that drives creative behaviors aligns with this stream of research.

Drawing upon these insights, we hypothesize that higher levels of extraversion among salespeople will positively predict their engagement in value-based selling behaviors and overall sales performance. Extraversion is expected to trigger harmonious passion as a form of positive emotion, which, in turn, serves as a motivational agent for creativity, facilitating the generation of innovative approaches in sales interactions (i.e., the core process). Consequently, we anticipate that salespeople with higher levels of extraversion will exhibit higher levels of harmonious passion and enhanced sales performance through the proposed core process.

H2b The salespeople's extraversion at Time 1 is positively associated with harmonious passion at Time 2.

H3b The indirect effect of the salespeople's extraversion at Time 1 on sales performances at Time 2 through the core process at Time 2 is positive and significant.

While extraversion alone may not directly correlate with individual selling behaviors, its interaction with group-related variables might offer significant insights into the relationships at stake (Neubert et al., 2006). Hence, to fully understand the impact of extraversion on sales performance, we must consider moderating factors to explain this relationship fully (Stewart, 1996).

Building upon the social exchange perspective, we propose that the store manager's empathy plays a critical role in amplifying the influence of a salesperson's extraversion on their performance. By reciprocating the social exchanges initiated by

extroverted salespeople, empathetic store managers foster a positive work environment where salespeople feel valued and supported. We posit that this interaction enhances salespeople's motivation, particularly in terms of harmonious passion, leading to improved performance in their sales roles. Formally:

H4b The interaction between the manager's empathy per store and the salespeople's extraversion at Time 1 positively predicts the salespeople's harmonious passion at Time 2, with a stronger effect of salespeople's extraversion on salespeople's harmonious passion expected when store managers display greater empathy.

2.2.9. Role overload

Next, we introduce *role overload* as a significant predictor, capturing salespeople's overwhelming demands and expectations within their job roles (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). This perception often leads to stress, pressure, and stemming from unmanageable deadlines, time constraints, high responsibilities, or tasks surpassing available resources (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2019). While role overload correlates with outcomes organizations value (i.e., more work being accomplished with the same amount of resources), it primarily reflects personal costs such as job stress and work-family conflict (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Shultz et al., 2010).

In the sales context, role overload is pervasive, with salespeople pressured to swiftly identify opportunities, predict changing customer needs, and manage non-selling tasks (Mulki et al., 2008). While role overload is often studied alongside role conflict and role ambiguity (Jaramillo et al., 2011), we expect role overload to take precedence as a stressor due to the demanding nature of tasks in retail settings such as customer service and inventory management, overshadowing the comparatively less prevalent issues of

role conflict and ambiguity. The structured hierarchies and task-oriented nature of retail roles mitigate the relevance of role conflict and ambiguity, as salespeople primarily focus on meeting customer needs within well-defined job roles. Considering the retail context, addressing role overload on its own is relevant for predicting employee levels of passion and creativity.

While the link between role overload, job stress, and performance is well established (Brown et al., 2005; Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984), our study extends previous research by exploring its detrimental effect on creative behaviors, aligning with findings on role overload, passion, and creativity (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2019). We propose that overwhelmed salespeople may experience fatigue, stress, and depletion of mental and emotional resources, resulting in a diminished passion for work and hindered creative thinking through our proposed core process.

H2c The salespeople's role overload at Time 1 is negatively associated with salespeople's harmonious passion at Time 2.

H3c The indirect effect of the salespeople's role overload at Time 1 on sales performances at Time 2 through the core process at Time 2 is negative and significant.

Within the Social Exchange Theoretical framework, role overload profoundly influences workplace dynamics. We believe its impact is multifaceted and posit that high role overload can limit social interactions, reduce support opportunities, and foster feelings of unfairness. Additionally, we expect role overload to strain relationships by undermining trust and cooperation, hindering individuals from assisting colleagues, and escalating tension. Recent research highlights the pivotal role of manager-subordinate

exchanges in mitigating role overload's adverse effects on performance (Tang & Vandenberghe, 2021). Accordingly, we argue that managerial empathy serves as a valuable reward, countering the detrimental impact of role overload on salespeople's harmonious passion marking the onset of the proposed core process.

H4c The interaction between the manager's empathy per store and the employee's role overload at Time 1 positively predicts the salespeople's harmonious passion at Time 2, with a stronger effect of role overload on salespeople's harmonious passion expected when managers display greater empathy.

2.2.10. Empowerment

Our definition of *empowerment* involves managers engaging subordinates in decision-making processes and distributing power to optimize overall performance (Martin & Bush, 2006). Empowerment is characterized as intrinsic motivation (Guerrero et al., 2018), in line with Amabile's theory (Amabile, 1996), encompassing a sense of meaning, self-determination, and perceived impact within the work environment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Previous sales research indicates that salespeople high in creativity generate the highest sales when they experience high-quality exchange with their superior, where autonomy, referred to as empowerment, is an indicator of quality (Martinaityte & Scramento, 2013). Thus, we posit that salespeople entrusted with greater responsibility, decision-making authority, and ownership over their work—greater empowerment—are more likely to feel passionate about their work and adopt creative behaviors, eventually leading to greater sales performance through the proposed process.

H2d The salespeople's empowerment at Time 1 is positively associated with salespeople's harmonious passion at Time 2.

H3d The indirect effect of the salespeople's empowerment at Time 1 on sales performances at Time 2 through the core process at Time 2 is positive and significant.

Drawing upon the Social Exchange Theory, we posit that the interaction between the manager's empathy and the employee's empowerment predicts the employee's harmonious passion. Empathetic managers, distinguished by their profound understanding, genuine warmth, and steady support, cultivate an environment where empowered salespeople thrive and feel profoundly valued and appreciated. Heightened empowerment fosters reciprocal resource exchanges and strengthens workplace interpersonal relationships. A sense of empowerment is expected to enhance salespeople's harmonious passion and creativity as they feel free to take the initiative and experiment with new ideas. Formally,

H4d The interaction between the manager's empathy per store and the salespeople's empowerment at Time 1 positively predicts the salespeople's harmonious passion at Time 2, with a stronger effect of salespeople's empowerment on salespeople's harmonious passion expected when managers display greater empathy.

2.2.11. Job engagement

Thus far, our predictor's selection has encompassed variables related to the organization (i.e., organizational commitment), personal traits (i.e., extraversion), the perception of the work itself (i.e., role overload), and the dynamics between the store manager and the salesperson (i.e., empowerment). To finalize our predictor framework, we include job engagement as a crucial link between the salesperson and their role. *Job engagement* is "the investment of an individual's complete self into a role" (Rich et al.,

2010, p. 617). In their work, the same authors highlight the encompassing nature of the construct and its significance in assessing the mechanisms that connect employee characteristics, organizational factors, and employee job performance, which perfectly fits our proposed model.

Previous research has shown that highly engaged employees exhibit a strong passion for their work, with creativity mediating the relationship between this engagement and performance (Ismail et al., 2019). Additionally, other studies have indicated that work engagement mediates the link between perceived organizational support and employee creativity (Aldabbas et al., 2021). Moreover, it has been observed that employees demonstrating harmonious passion tend to achieve superior job performance, with this connection predominantly influenced by cognitive absorption, reflecting the depth of concentration and engagement during work tasks (Ho et al., 2011). Collectively, these findings provide shreds of evidence of the positive relationship between job engagement and harmonious passion, subsequently fostering creativity. Therefore, we anticipate highly engaged salespeople to possess a conducive mindset for nurturing passion and creativity, as they are more inclined to explore innovative sales approaches, take risks, and generate creative solutions through the proposed core process.

H2e The employee's job engagement at Time 1 is positively associated with harmonious passion at Time 2.

H3e The indirect effect of the salespeople's job engagement at Time 1 on sales performances at Time 2 through the core process at Time 2 is positive and significant.

Within the framework of Social Exchange Theory, job engagement illustrates the reciprocal relationship between employees and their organization. Employees invest their time and effort into their work roles with the expectation of receiving valued resources and rewards from the organization. In turn, the organization is anticipated to reciprocate salespeople's engagement by providing recognition, opportunities for advancement, and a supportive work environment, which we argue is manifested through management empathy. From a managerial perspective, we expect the store manager's empathy to be perceived as organizational support for passion and creativity, aligning with previous literature on organizational factors that foster creativity (Zhou & George, 2001). We posit the following:

H4e The interaction between the manager's empathy per store and the salespeople's job engagement at Time 1 positively predicts the salespeople's harmonious passion at Time 2, with a stronger effect of salespeople's job engagement on salespeople's harmonious passion expected when managers display greater empathy.

2.3. Methodology

2.3.1. Sample and data collection

To test our hypothesis, we collected survey-based data from a well-established art and supply chain comprising 34 stores across Canada. By focusing on a single organization, we can avoid potential explanations specific to certain industries or influenced by unknown external environmental factors. Furthermore, the chosen industry is characterized by a shared interest in art, suggesting that creativity will likely be prominent among its salespeople. Such a specific context offers a fruitful opportunity for

conducting this research. Lastly, we consider the chosen retailer an excellent representation of small specialty retailers facing the fierce competition of retail giants.

The data collection consists of two waves (Time 1 and Time 2), spaced approximately six months apart, to explore the predictive relationship between the proposed variables over time. By measuring predictors and moderators at Time 1 and outcomes at Time 2, our design offers theoretical and practical advantages. Firstly, it allows for examining the temporal nature of causal relationships, offering insights into the time lag between the introduction of changes in predictors and moderators preceding changes in outcomes. Secondly, it facilitates causality testing by establishing temporal precedence, enhancing the validity of findings. Lastly, this approach helps address endogeneity issues by establishing a more precise temporal order between variables, reducing the likelihood of biased estimates, and providing more robust findings.

We collected data at the salesperson level (Level 1) and the manager/store level (Level 2), pairing salespeople with their corresponding managers, and thereby reflecting the store structure. In this setup, variables self-reported by the manager at a store level are categorized as Level 2, while those self-reported by the salespeople are classified as Level 1. Level-1 variables offer insights into salespeople's individual perspectives, whereas Level-2 variables, such as manager's empathy levels, apply to all salespeople within the same store. The salesperson's sales performance, as evaluated by the manager, falls under Level-1 variables as it relates to the salesperson at the individual level. This categorization acknowledges the hierarchical nature of the organization. In a dyadic survey design, it is pivotal to differentiate between those providing information about a higher-level unit (Level-2), in this case, the store, and those providing data at the individual level (Level-

1). Both store managers and salespeople completed separate surveys at each wave, encompassing self-evaluated items and evaluations of subordinates' sales performance.

2.3.2. Common method bias

We adopted the following steps to assess and mitigate the variance attributable to the measurement method (CMV). First, we rely on multi-source data (i.e., store managers and salespeople), which is expected to reduce CMV as all construct data are not collected from a single respondent, providing a balanced view of the variables under investigation (Hulland et al., 2018). Second, we guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality to the respondents to avoid social desirability bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, by introducing a time lag between surveys, we expect participants to be less likely to remember their previous responses, thus reducing the potential for bias. Finally, we include theoretically relevant control variables that might influence the relationships under investigation, reducing the potential influence of common method bias on the results.

2.3.3. Measurements and scales

All measurement scales are derived from well-established scales and are all self-reported. Level-1 variables pertain to the individual salespeople who work under the supervision of their respective store managers, who are associated with Level-2 variables. A summary of construct definitions, scales, items, and reliability scores is available in Appendix 2.7.2. The instrument was available in both of Canada's official languages.

Harmonious Passion (Level-1) Consistent with the dualistic model of Passion (Vallerand et al., 2003), we measured self-evaluated individual passion with the seven items related to harmonious passion based on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (completely agree). Examples are “the new things that I discover with this

activity allow me to appreciate it even more” and “for me, it is a passion, that I still manage to control.”

Creativity (Level-1) While our theoretical development relies greatly on Amabile’s work (Amabile 1996), the associated measurement tool (i.e., consensual assessment technique; CAT) might not be suitable for this study. Firstly, it is difficult to operationalize as it relies on the judgment of “experts.” Secondly, using experts or judges remains controversial in determining the appropriate level of expertise required (Plucker & Markel, 2010). Thirdly, research relying on the CAT has been criticized for lacking empirical evidence demonstrating its predicting value (Plucker & Markel, 2010). For these reasons, we opted for a 5-item creativity self-evaluated scale adapted to the sales context (Lussier et al., 2017) ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree). Examples are “I suggest new ways to achieve goals or objectives” and “I exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity to.”

Value-based selling behaviors (Level-1) The employee’s ability to articulate and deliver value in a sales context is measured using Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih’s (2018) 3-item scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (completely agree). Despite the prevalence of the Terho et al. (2015) scale in sales literature, Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih’s scale is more suitable for our B2C perspective as it can be used without any modification. Examples are “I have the ability to articulate a product/service worth in time, effort, and money” and “I have the ability to make the customer feel they're getting their money’s worth.”

Sales performance (Level-1) To assess the manager-rated subjective evaluation of salespeople’s sales performance, we rely on the scale proposed by Lussier et al. (2021)

and the work of Martin and Bush (2006). The scale comprises four items ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (completely agree). Examples are “This salesperson has a good selling ability” and “This salesperson has a good overall job performance.”

Organizational commitment (Level-1) The employee’s organizational commitment is measured with a shortened version of the scale proposed by (J. Deconinck & Johnson, 2009) in the sales context. The 3-item scale, ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree), includes “I really feel as if this organization’s problems are my own” and “I do not feel “emotionally attached” to this organization (reverse coded).”

Extraversion (Level-1) The employee’s extraversion is measured using a scale derived from the Big Five Inventory and relies on three items (Farrington, 2012). The 3-item scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree) includes items such as “I am someone who is reserved” (reverse) and “I am someone who is outgoing, sociable.”

Role overload (Level-1, 2) The employee’s role overload is measured according to the 3-item role overload scale proposed by (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Items range from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree) and include “It seems like I never have enough time to do what I need to do at work” and “I often feel like I have too much work for one person.”

Empowerment (Level-1, 2) The employee’s empowerment scale is derived from the empowerment scale proposed by (Martin & Bush, 2006) in a sales manager-salesperson dyadic study. We rely on three items ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree). Items examples are: “I can decide for myself how to do my job” and “I master the skills necessary for my work.”

Job engagement (Level-1) The employee's job engagement (i.e., physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement) measures rely on a simplified version of the scale proposed by Rich et al. (2010). The 3-item scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree) includes items such as "I put in a lot of effort at work" and "I am focused on my work tasks."

Empathy (Level-2) The manager's empathy is self-rated using a 4-item scale adapted to salespeople (Agnihotri & Krush, 2015) and ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (completely agree). Examples are "I always demonstrate a caring attitude toward other people" and "I want to help when others encounter problems."

Control variables (Level-1) Intuitively, one might expect the passion and creativity exhibited by salespeople to diminish over time as they settle into their routines. However, findings from the creativity literature suggest that job stability, typically associated with later stages in one's career, can serve as a precursor to creativity (Amabile, 1996). Additionally, prior research has suggested that salespeople with high levels of organizational commitment tend to stay with the organization longer, allowing them to develop their skills further, thereby enhancing their performance (Pettijohn et al., 2007). To reconcile this apparent paradox, we incorporated tenure measures in the organization. Furthermore, to ensure consistency with individual performance measurement, we assessed the tenure under the current manager, gender, and age.

2.4. Results

2.4.1. Measurement properties

We evaluated the model items using AMOS 28. All constructs' composite reliability (CR) exceeded .70, except for employee empowerment, which scored .61.

However, this is still considered acceptable in exploratory contexts, according to Hair et al. (2019), and indicates satisfactory convergence and overall model stability. Moreover, all Cronbach's alpha values surpassed commonly accepted thresholds, except for employee empowerment (.62) and empathy (.67), which fell on the lower end of the acceptable range. For the store manager's empathy, we achieved a significantly greater alpha (.84) by removing the last item of the scale. Finally, the average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than .50 for all constructs except, again, for employee empowerment (.37) and employee extraversion (.42), which is just under the limit to suggest adequate convergent validity. Table 3.3 summarizes the constructs' correlations and the relevant descriptive statistics.

We conducted two confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to assess the model fit. The first model incorporates all constructs in our model with the predictors and empathy measured at Time 1 and the remaining variables measured at Time 2. The second model includes only the predictor variables measured at Time 1. Our findings reveal a χ^2 value of 1235.74 with 657 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.01$) and a χ^2/df ratio of 1.88. Additionally, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = .918), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = .903), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = .038) all indicate a good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh et al., 2004). As for the second model, including all predictors, we find a χ^2 of 313.18 with 109 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.01$) and χ^2/df ratio of 2.87. The CFI = .910, the TLI = .873, and the RSMEA = .055 indicate a proper model fit. Based on these results, we are confident in pursuing the following analyses.

Table 3.3 – Correlation matrix and descriptive statistics

Constructs and Descriptive Statistics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Employee's Organizational Commitment	--													
2. Employee's Extraversion	.06	--												
3. Employee's Role Overload	-.31**	.00	--											
4. Employee's Empowerment	.40**	.06	.14*	--										
5. Employee's Job Engagement	.52**	-.01	-.07	.58**	--									
6. Manager's Empathy per Store	-.03	-.02	-.03	.03	.10	--								
7. Employee's Harmonious Passion	.28**	.12	-.03	.21**	.24**	.05	--							
8. Employee's Creativity	.25**	.15*	.10	.43**	.38**	-.08	.36**	--						
9. Employee's Value-Based Selling Behaviors	.26**	.26**	-.03	.33**	.32**	-.09	.37**	.49**	--					
10. Employee's Sales Performance (Manager-rated)	.10	.13	.19**	.24**	.07	.38**	.00	.17**	-.01	--				
11. Employee's Age (Control)	.02	.02	.11	.22**	.25**	.04	-.04	.06	.05	.11	--			
12. Employee's Gender (Control)	-.02	.00	.00	.02	.00	-.04	.11	.06	.04	.06	-.16**	--		
13. Employee's Tenure in Organization (Control)	.01	.03	.16**	.23**	.15*	-.02	-.05	.12	-.00	.22**	.59**	-.13*	--	
14. Employee's Tenure Under Current Manager (Control)	-.04	.09	.13*	.11	.01	-.23**	.10	.01	-.07	.21**	.28**	-.01	.48**	--
Mean	4.05	3.81	2.31	4.01	4.33	6.63	5.31	5.34	5.82	5.82	34.97	N/A	5.85	3.02
SD	.93	1.28	1.21	.70	.66	.63	1.32	1.18	1.06	1.03	16.09	N/A	7.27	3.38
Cronbach's alpha	.88	.76	.93	.62	.77	.84	.89	.93	.91	.90	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Composite Reliability (CR)	.89	.77	.93	.61	.77	.86	.91	.93	.91	.91	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	.72	.42	.81	.37	.53	.67	.58	.73	.78	.71	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

*p<.05; **p<.01 (2-tailed)

2.4.2. Linear Mixed Modeling

Our study proposes a series of linear mixed modeling (LMM) models that measure employee and store/manager observations. LMM helps avoid the aggregation or disaggregation problem, decomposes variance in outcomes across two hierarchical levels, and explains this variance at corresponding levels (Heck et al., 2013). It can also analyze unbalanced data sets with missing data and account for multilevel data correlated and dependent nature by specifying random effects for the residuals. Including random effects for the residuals, LMM allows for properly handling correlation structures, dependencies, and unobserved heterogeneity in multilevel data, leading to more accurate and reliable statistical inference (West et al., 2007). We apply these principles to test the moderation hypotheses involving Level-1 and -2 variables. The remaining hypotheses are estimated using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018) as they do not include a multi-level data structure but sequential mediation processes involving up to 3 mediators.

2.4.3. Overview of our results

Upon completing the two waves, we obtained the following valid responses: 271 salespeople for Time 1, 377 salespeople for Time 2, and 37 store managers for Time 1. Once the matching was completed, we found 271 store manager-salesperson dyads. Our sample is 69.4% female, with a mean age of 34.9 years ($SD = 16.09$). The average salesperson tenure in the organization is 5.85 years ($SD = 7.27$), and the average period under the current manager is 3.02 years ($SD = 3.38$). Means (out of 7) associated with the core process variables are all in the medium-high range: employee's harmonious passion $\bar{x} = 5.31$ ($SD = 1.32$), employee's creativity $\bar{x} = 5.34$ ($SD = 1.18$), and employee's value-based selling behaviors $\bar{x} = 5.82$ ($SD = 1.06$), suggesting a positive outcome. However, it

also reveals the need for special attention to potential issues related to skewed distribution in our sample.

Figure 3.2 provides an overview of our framework's main and interaction effects. The corresponding models' main and interaction effects are detailed in Table 3.5. Most effects are significant and in the expected direction. However, a few relationships are not significant. Out of the five proposed predictors, organizational commitment ($\beta = .228, \rho = .007$), empowerment ($\beta = .173, \rho = .047$), and job engagement ($\beta = .214, \rho = .015$) led to significant and positive effects. The remaining two predictors, extraversion and role overload, are the only ones generating significant interactions with the store manager's empathy ($\beta = .282, \rho = .003$, and $\beta = .234, \rho = .029$).

Next, we find that harmonious passion positively affects creativity ($\beta = .572, \rho < .001$), which in turn positively influences value-based selling behaviors ($\beta = .573, \rho < .001$), confirming the core process of the model. Unfortunately, we could not confirm the core process's positive effect on sales performance, where the effect of value-based selling behaviors on sales performance is non-significant (Model 8 in Table 1.5). Our discussion, combined with post hoc analyses, addresses this issue. Next, we formally test our hypotheses.

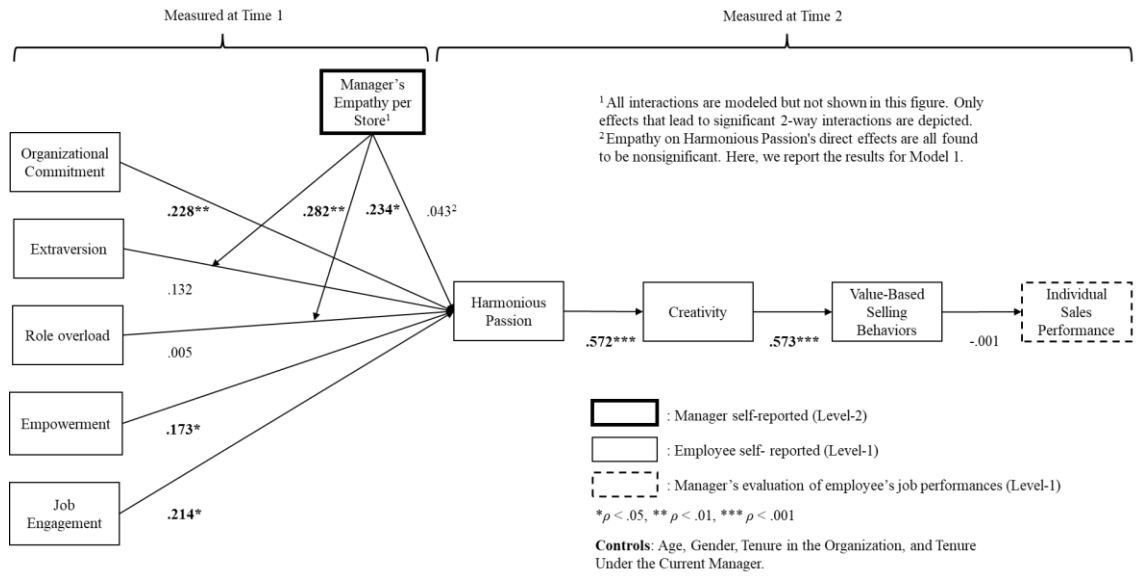


Fig. 3.2- Presentation of main and interaction effects

2.4.4. Test of hypotheses

Mediation analyses of the core process (H1) H1 suggests that the relationship between the sequence depicted by our core process—harmonious passion → creativity → value-based selling behaviors, and sales performance is positive. We used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018) and model 6 to test this hypothesis, incorporating two sequential mediators. Our results indicate that both the direct (c') and total effects (c) of harmonious passion on sales performance are positive but not statistically significant (effect c' =.01, ρ =.93 and effect c =.05, ρ =.55). The indirect effect through creativity (a_1b_1) yielded a significant positive effect (effect=.10, 95% CI [.03, .18]), while the indirect effects through value-based selling behaviors (a_2b_2 ; effect=-.03, 95% CI [-.03, .001]) and the creativity-value-based selling behaviors path ($a_2d_2b_2$; effect=-.02, 95% CI [-.05, .001]) were not significant. The effect is significant if the corresponding confidence interval does not include zero. Figure 3.3 summarizes the effects. These results support the harmonious passion → creativity → value-based selling behaviors path as the core process. However,

the analysis unveils a potentially problematic relationship between value-based selling behaviors and sales performance within the dataset under scrutiny. Our findings do not entirely support H1.

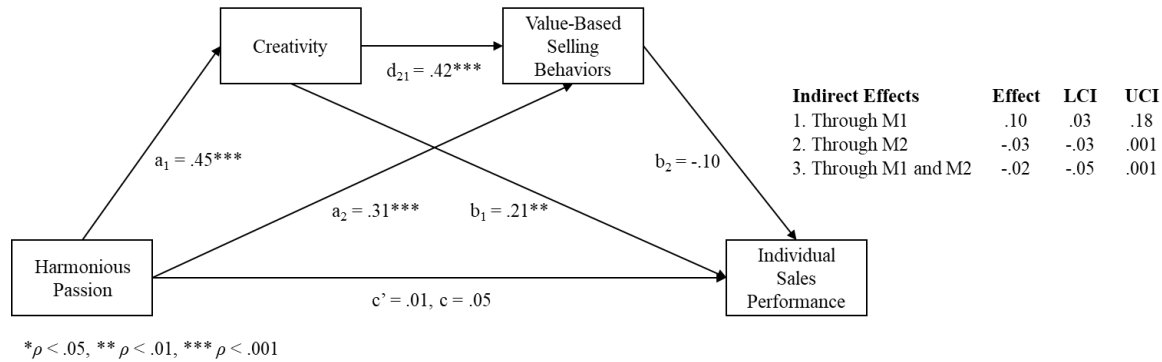


Fig. 3.3- H1 serial mediation results

Direct effects of the predictors on harmonious passion (H2_{a-e}) The next five hypotheses propose that each of the proposed predictors is individually and positively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion, except for role overload, which is expected to have a negative effect on harmonious passion. We ran five LMMs, including our control variables, and found that organizational commitment ($\beta = .228, \rho = .007$), empowerment ($\beta = .173, \rho = .047$), and job engagement ($\beta = .214, \rho = .015$) all lead to positive and significant effects. The direct effects associated with extraversion and role overload are non-significant. H2a, H2d, and H2e are supported.

Serial mediation analysis of the predictors (H3_{a-e}) We test the effect of these predictors on sales performance through the core process H3_{a-e}. To accomplish this, we utilize the PROCESS macro and Model 6, but this time by specifying three sequential mediators. Because the macro only allows one predictor at a time, we conducted five separate models, each incorporating one of our five proposed predictors. We find that the direct effect (c’) of the predictor (Xi) on sales performance without considering the

mediators is positive and significant for both role overload $\beta(c') = .16, \rho = .017$, and empowerment $\beta(c') = .37, \rho = <.001$. The total effect (c), which combines the effect of all mediators in the serial mediation model, yields positive and significant effect for extraversion $\beta(c) = .14, \rho = .043$, overload $\beta(c) = .18, \rho = .003$, and empowerment $\beta(c) = .36, \rho = <.001$. Next, we look at the indirect effect through all mediators, explicitly examining the sequential mediation process and capturing the cumulative impact of each mediator in the chain ($a_1d_2b_2d_3$). We find the cumulative indirect effect non-statistically significant for all predictors. Table 3.4 summarizes the bootstrap analysis results. These results imply that while mediation may occur, the data does not support the full sequential mediation process as hypothesized. H3a-e are not supported.

Table 3.4 – Direct and indirect effects of the predicting variables on sales performance through the core process

Predicting variable (X_i)	Direct effect (c')	Total indirect effect (c)	Indirect effect ($a_1d_2b_2d_3$) $X_i \rightarrow HP \rightarrow CRE \rightarrow VBS \rightarrow SP$
Organizational commitment	.17	.17	-.01
Extraversion	.14	.14*	-.00
Role overload	.16*	.18**	-.00
Empowerment	.37***	.36***	-.00
Job engagement	.10	.13	-.00

HP: harmonious passion, CRE: creativity, VBS: value-based selling behaviors, and SP: sales performance

* $\rho < .05$, ** $\rho < .01$, *** $\rho < .001$

Moderation analyses (H4a-e) While these first hypotheses are all studied at Level 1, reflecting the salesperson’s perspective and individual sales performance, our theoretical development raises the possible interaction between the proposed predictors and a higher-level variable. Accordingly, H4a to H4e examine the moderating role of the manager’s empathy per store on the relationship between the hypothesized predictors and

harmonious passion. We rely on the SPSS MIXED command to execute a series of Linear Mixed Models (LMM) to validate these hypotheses. This command possesses the flexibility required to accommodate our multilevel model, given that our moderator is at the store/manager level (Level 2) and our independent and dependent variables are on the employee level (Level 1). The interaction results are detailed under Models 1 to 5 in Table 3.5. The analysis reveals a significant interaction between the store manager's empathy and the employee's extraversion ($\beta=.28, \rho=.003$) and between the store manager's empathy and the employee's perceived role overload ($\beta=.23, \rho=.029$). Corresponding main effects are not significant. We find support for both H4b and H4c.

To correctly interpret these interaction effects, we first refer to Figure 3.4. The figure illustrates the effect of low (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) and high (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean) levels of store manager's empathy on harmonious passion at low (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) and high (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean) levels of the predicting variable. We find that the highest levels of harmonious passion are experienced by salespeople who are high in extraversion and have a store manager high in empathy. On the other hand, extraverts working under a store manager who is low in empathy experience a detrimental effect on their level of harmonious passion. These results are consistent with our theoretical development. However, the most intriguing finding arises from an unexpected association concerning individuals low in extraversion working in conjunction with store managers exhibiting heightened levels of empathy. Common intuition suggests that empathetic leadership would encourage salespeople to express themselves by providing a supportive environment that fosters support and tolerance toward sales personnel who may not

inherently possess extraversion, a trait traditionally valued within sales contexts. Contrary to this presumption, our analysis unveils a paradoxical result: the lowest levels of harmonious passion are observed among sales representatives lacking extraversion operating under empathetic store managers' guidance.

Table 3.5 – The direct and interaction effects of the predictor's variables, harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors.

	Employee's Harmonious Passion					Employee's Creativity	Value-Based Selling Behaviors	Sales Performances
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Schwarz's Bayesian Criterion (BIC)	394.85	394.55	401.43	401.87	397.79	489.36	510.58	449.83
Intercept	-.089	-.146	-.159	-.180	-.004	.048	-.121	-.301
Predictor Variables (Level I)								
Organizational Commitment (OC)	.228**							
Extraversion (EXT)		.132						
Role Overload (RO)			.005					
Empowerment (POW)				.173*				
Job Engagement (JE)					.214*			
Age (control)	.003	.003	.000	.003	.000	.002	.007	.002
Gender Female = 2 (control)	.061	.111	.193	.099	.006	-.158	-.045	.191
Tenure in organization (control)	-.026	-.025	-.022	-.027	-.026	.022*	-.014	.016
Tenure under current manager (control)	.030	.028	.032	.041	.047	-.021	-.013	.023
Core Process Variables (Level I)								
Harmonious Passion						.572***		
Creativity							.573***	
Value-Based Selling Behaviors								-.001
Manager's/Store-Level Variables (Level II)								
Empathy (EMP)	.043	.109	.001	.053	.016			
Interactions[†]								
OC x EMP	-.168							
EXT x EMP		.282**						
RO x EMP			.234*					
POW x EMP				-.080				
JE x EMP					-.191			

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

† No significant 3-way interactions found

Note: All the coefficients are standardized expect for age, gender, tenure in organization, tenure under current management, and work location which are categorical or continuous variables.

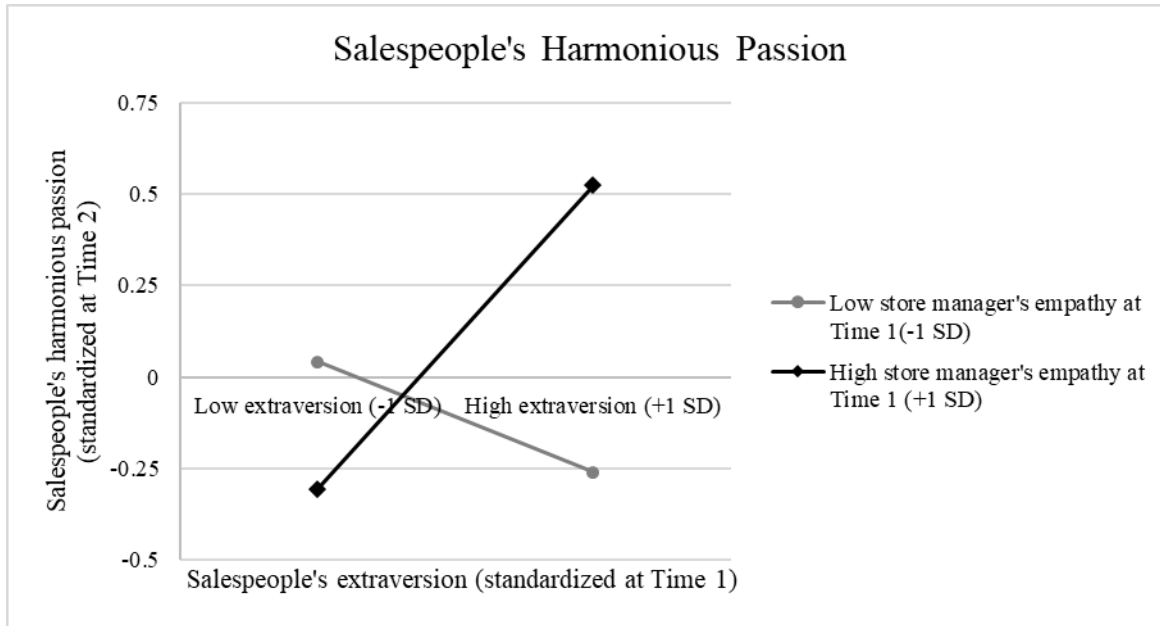


Fig. 3.4- Manager's empathy interaction with the salespeople's extraversion

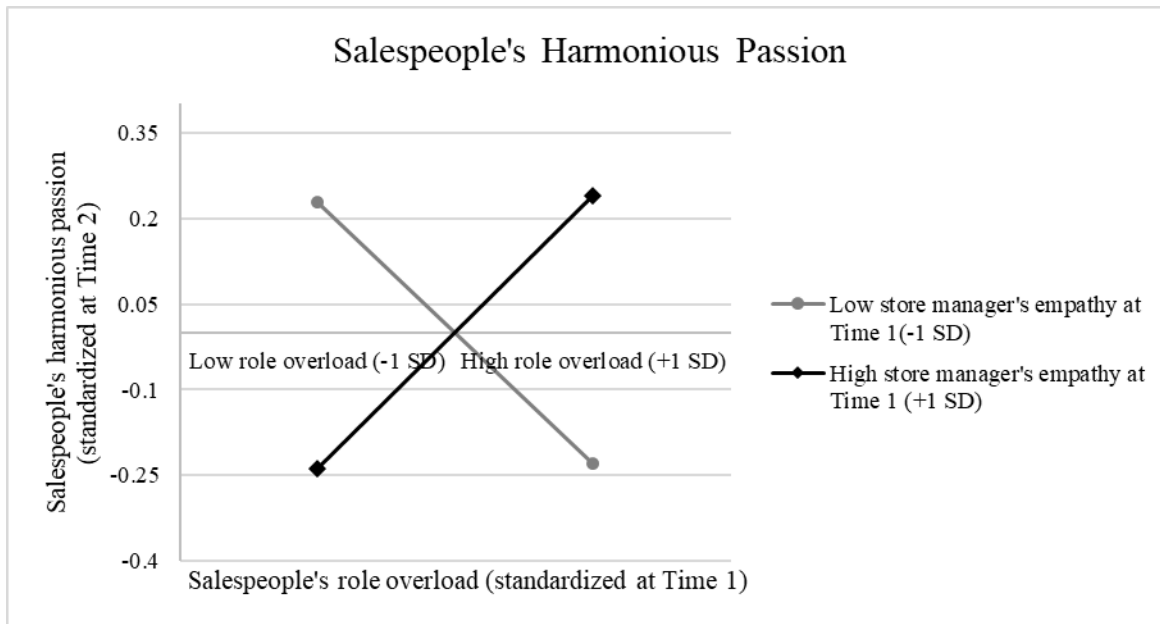


Fig. 3.5- Manager's empathy interaction with the salespeople's perceived role overload

In H4c, we explore how the salespeople's perception of role overload interacts with the store managers' empathy to predict levels of harmonious passion. High levels of role overload are expected to inhibit the generation of harmonious passion among salespeople. We also predicted that high role overload levels could be conducive to higher levels of

passion if subjected to a store manager's high empathy. Our result, illustrated in Figure 3.5, confirms this hypothesis. The highest levels of harmonious passion are found in salespeople experiencing high levels of role overload under a store manager high on empathy. In contrast, the level of passion is greatly impeded by a store manager who is low in empathy.

Under low role overload conditions, the results are more nuanced. When highly empathetic managers oversee salespeople with low role overload, they exhibit the lowest harmonious passion levels. We also measured similar levels of harmonious passion for salespeople who have a low perceived role overload and are under a store manager with a low level of empathy than in the conditions of high role overload and high empathy. These results hint at the importance of striking a balance between empathy and role overload, where overly empathic behavior can potentially impede rather than enhance passion in the workplace. These results warrant an essential conversation that we provide in the general discussion.

Effects of control variables Regarding control variables, we include the salesperson's tenure in the organization and the tenure under the current manager. Additionally, we control for two demographic variables: age and gender identification. None of the control variables lead to a significant effect except for the salespeople's tenure in the organization on creativity, which is positive and significant ($\beta=.02, p<.050$; Model 6). There's no evidence in sales literature that age or gender would impact passion or creativity in the workplace. As for tenure and creativity, we can find support in sales creativity literature for this result, where previous research in the field of creativity has

revealed that job stability, which is typically associated with later stages in one's career, can serve as an antecedent to creativity (Amabile, 1996).

2.4.5. *Post hoc analyses section*

Given the lack of evidence supporting H1 and H2 in demonstrating the effect of the proposed core process on individual sales performance, we conducted a series of post hoc analyses. From the results of H1, we observe that upon removing value-based selling behaviors from the equation, the mediation sequence becomes positive and significant, highlighting a clear effect between creativity and sales performance (Indirect Effect = .10, 95% CI [.03, .18]) as reported in Figure 3.3. These results suggest that our sample data at Time 2 is probably responsible, especially since we found support for this sequence in the first essay (Boissonneault, 2024). To validate this finding further, we delved deeper into the equations associated with H2. We extracted the indirect effect of the proposed predictors on sales performance while excluding value-based selling behaviors from the mediating path. Table 3.6 summarizes the results. The indirect effects of our predictors on sales performances through harmonious passion and creativity alone reveal a positive and significant indirect effect (*a1d21b2*) for organizational commitment (Indirect Effect = .04, 95% CI [.01, .08]) and a negative and significant effect for role overload (Indirect Effect = -.02, 95% CI [-.04, -.001]) where both confidence intervals exclude zero. We discuss these results in the next section.

Table 3.6 – Indirect effects of the predicting variables on sales performance through all mediators except for value-based selling behaviors

Predicting variable (X_i)	Indirect effect ($a_1d_2b_2$) $X_i \rightarrow HP \rightarrow CRE \rightarrow$ SP	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Organizational commitment	.04	.01	.08
Extraversion	.01	-.01	.03
Role overload	-.02	-.04	-.00
Empowerment	.01	-.00	.02
Job engagement	.01	-.00	.04

HP: harmonious passion, CRE: creativity, VBS: value-based selling behaviors, and SP: sales performance

Because individual sales performance is a variable subjectively evaluated by the store manager, we explored an additional control variable as a post hoc analysis. Among the variables related to the store manager, we identified the store manager's sales experience in years as a suitable control variable to explain our observed results. One could expect a manager with many years of experience in sales to be in a better position to recognize and evaluate the impact of adopting value-based selling behaviors in retail settings. Hence, we expect the store manager's sales experience to correlate with the salesperson's value-based selling behaviors and sales performance. To validate this assumption, we reran the models detailed in Table 3.5 as well as the fully mediated sequence associated with H3, but this time by including the store manager's sales experience at Time 1 as a covariate. Results related to the direct and interaction effects indicated that the store manager's sales experience had no significant impact in all models. We confirmed the previously obtained results except for the direct effect of empowerment on harmonious passion and the interaction between the store manager's empathy and role overload on harmonious passion. As for the replication of the test associated with H3

including the store manager’s sales experience as a covariate, we focused on two things in reviewing the results: (1) whether any of the indirect effects ($a_1d_{21}b_{2d}d_{32}$) became significant, and (2) whether sales experience generated any significant effects, and if so, with which variable. The results revealed that (1) none of the fully mediated paths became significant, and (2) the store manager’s sales experience correlated positively with salesperson creativity in three of the five models. Results are summarized in Table 3.7 and discussed in the following section.

Table 3.7 – Replication of H3 tests, including the manager’s sales experience as a covariate

Predicting variable (X_i)	Indirect effect ($a_1d_{21}b_{2d}d_{32}$) $X_i \rightarrow HP \rightarrow CRE \rightarrow VBS \rightarrow SP$	Manager’s sales experience significant effect
Organizational commitment	-.01	SE \rightarrow CRE
Extraversion	-.00	-
Role overload	.00	SE \rightarrow CRE
Empowerment	-.00	SE \rightarrow CRE
Job engagement	-.00	-

SE: Manager’s sales experience, HP: harmonious passion, CRE: creativity, VBS: value-based selling behaviors, and SP: sales performance

2.5. General Discussion

Our study aims to comprehensively understand the factors driving sales performance within the retail industry. Central to this investigation is the intricate process through which creative salespeople within retail settings adopt desired sales approaches. We examine the key antecedents to the proposed core process, including organizational commitment, extraversion, role overload, empowerment, and job engagement. Additionally, we replicate the testing of the effect of the core process on sales performance unveiled in the first essay, shedding light on the dynamic interplay between these variables. While the realms of sales and service literature have often touched upon passion

and creativity, how these phenomena are harnessed and translated into tangible sales performance outcomes remains, to this date, underexplored. By foregrounding the core process within our model, we shed light on the crucial role of harmonious passion in enabling creativity, which subsequently manifests in adopting value-based selling approaches. Drawing upon insights from the creativity literature, which posits that individuals exhibit heightened creativity when intrinsically motivated by their work (Amabile, 1996) and recognizing passion as a key motivation factor, we provide theoretical and empirical evidence to a previously unexplored facet of salespeople dynamics. As conceptualized by Vallerand (2003), harmonious passion emerges as a central factor in this process, encapsulating the positive emotions and sense of purpose derived from one's work. Our introduction of value-based selling behaviors into the retail sales domain marks an original contribution, suggesting that creativity is a critical mediator between passion and adopting this sales approach.

2.5.1. The core process's effect on sales performance (H1)

The initial phase of our study sought to validate the proposed core process involving salespeople's harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors' influence on sales performances. Results from our first essay provided empirical evidence of the mediating role of value-based selling behaviors between salespeople's creativity and sales performance (Boissonneault, 2024). Although robust evidence supported the core process as the mechanism for translating salespeople's harmonious passion into value-based selling behaviors by leveraging their creativity, our second study did not find evidence of a direct positive effect of the core process on sales performances as assessed by store managers.

Table 3.8 - Summary of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis		Results
H1	The employee's harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors, hereafter referred to as the core process, have a sequential indirect positive effect (i.e., harmonious passion → creativity → value-based selling behaviors) on sales performances as evaluated by the store manager (all measured at Time 2).	Not supported, indirect only through creativity
H2 _a	The employee's organizational commitment at Time 1 is positively associated with harmonious passion at Time 2.	Supported
H2 _b	The employee's extraversion at Time 1 is positively associated with harmonious passion at Time 2.	Not supported
H2 _c	The employee's role overload at Time 1 is negatively associated with harmonious passion at Time 2.	Not supported
H2 _d	The employee's empowerment at Time 1 is positively associated with harmonious passion at Time 2.	Supported
H2 _e	The employee's job engagement at Time 1 is positively associated with harmonious passion at Time 2.	Supported
H3 _{a-c}	The indirect effect of the employee's (a) employee organizational commitment, (b) extraversion, (c) role overload, (d) empowerment, and (e) job engagement at Time 1 on sales performances at Time 2 through the core process at Time 2 is positive (negative for (c) role overload) and significant.	Not supported
H4 _{a-c}	The interaction between manager empathy per store and (a) employee organizational commitment, (b) extraversion, (c) role overload, (d) empowerment, and (e) job engagement at Time 1 positively predicts the employee's level of harmonious passion at Time 2, with a stronger effect of (a), (b), (c), (d), and (e) on harmonious passion expected when managers display greater empathy.	H4b and H4c are supported

While our theoretical development supports the positive impact of the core process variables on sales performance, the non-significant results regarding the entire mediated chain (H1) prompt us to examine potential methodological limitations rather than question the conceptual validity of our model. It is important to note that sales performance in our study relies on evaluations provided by store managers. Such methodological choice might introduce bias and might fail to reflect salespeople's actual performance accurately. One plausible explanation for our findings could be the presence of higher performance expectations among managers for their subordinates, potentially leading to deflated performance scores that mask true performance levels. If such a dynamic were to occur, we would anticipate that tenure under the same manager would likely diminish this effect

as the relationship between the manager and employee strengthens over time, potentially leading to more accurate performance evaluations. Yet, our data revealed that tenure under the current manager did not significantly correlate with sales performance ($\beta = .02$, $\rho = .272$, Table 3.5, Model 8), suggesting that personal biases may not substantially influence performance evaluations. Nevertheless, relying solely on subjective evaluations may not provide a comprehensive picture of sales performance.

While these findings hint at the importance of collecting objective measures for sales performance, our post hoc analyses yielded valuable insights. We discovered that the core process positively influences sales performance when we remove value-based selling behaviors from the serial mediation. To elucidate this unexpected result, we revisit the role of the store manager. One suspicion is that the manager may not recognize value-based selling behaviors in their staff interactions with customers or may not view these behaviors as drivers of sales performance. They might perceive value-based selling as a diversion from more sales-oriented approaches. We propose to examine the store manager's sales experience to address these concerns. The assumption is that an experienced manager would recognize value-based selling as a valid approach to achieving sales performance. Conversely, an inexperienced manager would view value-based selling as a waste of time and consequently evaluate the salesperson's performance unfavorably. Unfortunately, our replication of H3 with the addition of the store manager's sales experience as a control variable did not provide evidence of such an effect. Instead, we found a significant correlation between the store manager's sales experience and the salesperson's creativity. While these results do not offer sufficient support for the

proposed core process effect on sales performance, they recognize, once again, the salesperson's creativity as a clear driver of sales performance.

Even with the last link of our proposed model not being supported by our data, our results still offer valuable theoretical insights. By bridging the gap between creativity theory and sales practices, our study provides unique perspectives on how salespeople in specialty retail settings can leverage creativity. This departure from conventional research paradigms, primarily focusing on B2B contexts, is facilitated by the distinctive nature of small specialty retailers, prioritizing personalized service and niche offerings. Our study confirms the relationships between passion, creativity, and sales performance while explaining their interplay. Additionally, despite our data not directly supporting this link, we underscore the importance of value-based selling behaviors in retail settings, recognizing its strong link with creativity within our core process. This insight offers valuable considerations for an industry navigating a highly competitive environment.

2.5.2. The antecedents to harmonious passion and the manager's empathy (H2)

The second phase of our study examined the antecedents of harmonious passion, which serves as the starting point of the proposed core process. We initially estimated the effects without the influence of a second-level moderator by investigating the impact of salespeople's organizational commitment, extraversion, role overload, empowerment, and job engagement, providing theoretical justification for exploring these predictors. While we observed significant and positive effects on harmonious passion for organizational commitment, empowerment, and job engagement, perceptions of role overload and self-evaluation of extraversion did not reveal significant effects. These findings indicate that

extraversion and role overload, in isolation, are insufficient to evoke a passionate response from salespeople.

The positive effect of organizational commitment on harmonious passion highlights the importance of cultivating a strong organizational culture among the sales team. It suggests that organizations investing in strategies to foster salespeople's emotional connection and identification with the organization may benefit from enhanced harmonious passion among salespeople. From a theoretical standpoint, our results contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical support for the link between organizational commitment and harmonious passion within the sales context (Crawford et al., 2022). We emphasize the relevance of considering organizational commitment as a key factor in understanding salespeople's motivational processes and behaviors.

Next, we find empowerment to be positively associated with harmonious passion. This result aligns with the assumption that empowerment fosters intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and perceived impact within the work environment. Our findings extend previous research by demonstrating that empowered salespeople are more likely to feel passionate about their work and engage in creative behaviors, ultimately leading to greater sales performance through the proposed core process (Martinaityte & Scramento, 2013). These findings imply that organizations should allocate resources towards initiatives that empower their sales teams, cultivating a work environment where salespeople feel valued and autonomous. This empirical evidence adds to the existing literature by substantiating the correlation between empowerment and harmonious passion within the sales domain.

Job engagement is the third pivotal predictor within our model, linking the salesperson to their role. It reflects the depth of an individual's investment in their work,

aligning with previous research and highlighting its positive association with harmonious passion and subsequent creativity (Ismail et al., 2019). Our findings support this notion, as we observed a significant positive association between job engagement and harmonious passion, indicating that highly engaged salespeople tend to exhibit stronger passion for their work.

While our theoretical development provided theoretical grounds regarding salespeople's perception of role overload and self-evaluation of extraversion in predicting harmonious passion in the sales context, the lack of significant results brings us back to the conceptualization of these variables. Our results indicate that role overload, which refers to the perception of having too many tasks or responsibilities to handle effectively (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2019), may not directly influence the emotional connection and dedication that characterize harmonious passion. One possible explanation could be related to the nature of the retail environment, where individuals thrive in dynamic and challenging situations, multitask, and manage multiple responsibilities as part of the job. Salespeople may view a high role overload as an opportunity to demonstrate their skills, resilience, and commitment rather than as a hindrance to their passion for their work. Additionally, salespeople may have developed coping mechanisms or strategies to manage role overload effectively, mitigating their passion levels' negative impact. Similarly, extraversion, while often associated with sociability and assertiveness (Steward et al., 2019), may not inherently lead to a more profound passion for one's work. In the context of sales, where interpersonal skills are under pressure, extraversion may be more relevant to other aspects of job performance rather than developing harmonious passion. Additionally, individual differences in the

interpretation of role overload and self-evaluation of extraversion may vary, potentially diluting its predictive power in this context. Considering the lack of significant results for role overload and extraversion in predicting harmonious passion, it's worth exploring the possibility of interactions with a higher-level variable.

2.5.3. The antecedent's effects on sales performance through the core process (H3)

Before looking into the manager's role, our third hypothesis aimed to uncover the potential impact of our antecedents on sales performance through the core process. While we found support for organizational commitment, empowerment, and job engagement as predictors of harmonious passion in H2, the results of H1 raised concerns regarding the end of the serial mediation sequence, particularly regarding value-based selling behaviors. Consistent with this last finding, we did not anticipate significant indirect effects in H3, which is indeed what we observed. None of the five predictors yielded a significant indirect effect when considering the full serial mediation chain.

We replicated the serial mediation in our post hoc analyses but omitted value-based selling behaviors. We found a significant and positive indirect effect on organizational commitment, reinforcing the predictive value of this antecedent. Surprisingly, we also observed a negative and significant indirect effect for role overload, which contradicts the results of H2. Methodological concerns may explain this disparity. As we added variables to the LMM models, we noticed a decrease in the degrees of freedom as missing values were excluded from the equation. These results underscore the importance of not only examining the entire serial chain but also exploring the direct effects between the predictors and harmonious passion. With these findings in mind, we now turn our attention to the store manager's role in predicting harmonious passion.

2.5.4. The moderating role of the manager's empathy per store (H4)

Our theoretical framework strongly suggests that the proposed predictors of harmonious passion will likely interact with an organizational-level variable, namely the manager's empathy per store. Interestingly, our results reveal that antecedents to harmonious passion that are non-significant on their own exhibit significant interactions with the manager's empathy. We discovered a significant interaction between the salesperson's extraversion and the manager's empathy in predicting harmonious passion. A positive and significant interaction emerged between the salesperson's perception of role overload and the manager's empathy in predicting harmonious passion. These interactions offer novel insights, particularly regarding highly extroverted salespeople who exhibit the highest levels of harmonious passion when paired with empathic managers. Surprisingly, for salespeople who are low in extraversion, the manager's empathy appears to have minimal impact on harmonious passion, resulting in the lowest levels of passion when combined with a highly empathic manager. The theory offers some insights into why we might have obtained these results. Harmonious passion is associated with positive emotions (Vallerand et al., 2003). We also know that extroverts need to believe in their ability to succeed and accomplish specific tasks to channel their extrovert personality into functional behavior at work (Yang et al., 2011). Our results indicate that for extroverts to foster their harmonious passion, both extraversion and the manager's empathy levels must be high. Otherwise, extroverts are not in a position to channel their efforts into a harmonious passion that feeds creativity.

While extraversion has to do with a salesperson's trait, the second interaction offers insight into the work itself and reflects the salesperson's perception of role overload. Our theoretical development associated with this construct hinted at the paradoxical effect

of role overload. On the one hand, role overload might lead to higher output, which management generally values. On the other hand, we know that personal costs are associated with higher output (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). We also showed that passion could overcome work-related challenges and drive salespeople through difficult work conditions. Yet, perceived role overload on its own does not drive harmonious passion. Our result shows that harmonious passion, despite the high level of role overload, will not be enabled unless we work under an empathic manager. The highest levels of harmonious passion are found in the context of high role overload under a manager with high empathy. Harmonious passion also achieves high scores under low role overload conditions and paired with a manager with low empathy. Conversely, low role overload and an empathic manager extinguished the passion. Understandably, the manager's empathy is not an on/off switch. To get the most out of their creative salespeople, empathic managers could, counterintuitively, increase their subordinate's responsibilities. In contrast, reducing the role overload for salespeople could lead to increased harmonious passion, especially when managers lack empathy. When salespeople perceive their role overload is manageable and not overwhelming, they are more likely to feel fulfilled and dedicated to their work, improve morale, and increase motivation to perform well.

2.5.5. Theoretical implications

Given the challenges faced by the small specialty retail industry, especially amidst heightened competition from online and big-box retailers, operators must effectively utilize their internal resources, focusing on their sales staff, to succeed in this competitive landscape. Our research delves into the complex interconnections among factors, including manager empathy, employee organizational commitment, extraversion, role overload, empowerment, and job engagement. By leveraging our data's multi-level and

multi-stage nature, we identify the combinations of these variables that positively impact the proposed core process. We also reveal potential adverse outcomes linked to elevated levels of these factors.

Our study makes significant theoretical contributions in three distinct areas. Firstly, we partially replicate the proposed core process's effect on sales performance introduced in the first essay (Boissonneault, 2024). While we couldn't reproduce the entire sequence, our findings provide robust evidence of the crucial role of salespeople's creativity in driving sales performance. We contribute to the ongoing conversation in sales literature by reinforcing the importance of creativity in sales contexts (Agnihotri et al., 2014) and highlighting its impact on organizational outcomes in retail settings.

Secondly, we identify salespeople's organizational commitment, empowerment, and job engagement as key predictors of harmonious passion. By incorporating these variables into our framework, we expand the understanding of factors influencing passion in the sales domain. Our original framework enriches existing literature (Crawford et al., 2022) by offering a comprehensive array of predictive variables supported by both theoretical foundations and empirical evidence.

Thirdly, we uncover the nuanced interplay between extraversion, role overload, and managerial empathy in driving harmonious passion. Our findings reveal that extraversion and role overload, when considered in isolation, may not suffice to stimulate harmonious passion among salespeople. However, these factors interact with the manager's empathy, indicating the importance of managerial behavior in shaping employee passion (Agnihotri & Krush, 2015). Interestingly, the three other predictors—

organizational commitment, empowerment, and job engagement—did not interact similarly with empathy, highlighting the unique dynamics at play.

2.5.6. Managerial implications

Managers wield a variety of tools to influence their workforce positively. These include investing resources in initiatives that foster creativity, such as brainstorming sessions and innovation challenges, and recognizing and rewarding innovative ideas to encourage creativity among salespeople. Our research suggests that managers may overlook the value of value-based selling behaviors, possibly due to their departure from traditional sales methods. Consequently, managers should receive training on the importance of value-based selling behaviors and align their perceptions with their value in the sales process.

Recognizing passion, creativity, and extraversion among salespeople is crucial. Managers should be trained to identify signs of harmonious passion, such as high enthusiasm, dedication, and persistence, as these traits correlate with intrinsic enjoyment and commitment to work. Additionally, managers should understand extroverted individuals within their teams and pair them appropriately to maximize their potential. Our study reveals that highly extroverted salespeople should ideally be paired with managers who are high in empathy. Conversely, managers low in empathy are well-suited to lead salespeople low in extraversion.

Creating an environment that encourages organizational commitment, job engagement, and empowerment is another vital aspect for managers. This involves providing opportunities for professional development, offering feedback and recognition, fostering open communication and trust, and implementing formal recognition programs aligned with organizational goals. Empowering salespeople by delegating decision-

making authority and promoting a healthy work-life balance also contributes significantly to enhancing passion and creativity among salespeople.

While role overload can be challenging, particularly in retail settings, an empathic manager can mitigate its negative impact and foster harmonious passion among salespeople. Empathetic leadership and a supportive work environment can enhance employee well-being and productivity. Managers can develop empathy through various training and practice methods to balance empathy, objectivity, and fairness to support their teams while driving organizational performance effectively.

2.5.7. Limitations and future research

The present research has several limitations. First and most importantly, our research failed to replicate the results of the first essay regarding the effect of the core process on sales performance as evaluated by the manager, despite its theoretical importance in the proposed core process (Boissonneault, 2024). This discrepancy suggests that other factors or mechanisms not accounted for in the study may play a more prominent role in driving sales performance in the context of small specialty retail. However, as previously discussed, we expect these results to be related to methodological concerns rather than conceptual ones. Therefore, we invite future research to adopt rigorous performance measures involving objective data. While we recognize that retail settings do not always collect individual sales data for their salespeople, we recommend data collection in retailers that track individual sales metrics (e.g., commission, sales target achievement). Otherwise, a combination of a manager's evaluation, salespeople's self-assessment, and customer feedback might offer a more robust performance measure.

Second, our sample could be deemed highly favorable to finding individuals strongly inclined toward creativity. Although our readings on creativity and passion

revealed that the context has to do with creativity, the context generally refers to the environment rather than the actual nature of the products or services at stake. Still, we invite future research to investigate the relationship between our proposed variables in different retail sectors, industries, and organization sizes that might be less favorable to creativity to rule out this hypothesis and ensure broader applicability.

Third, the findings of this study diverge from previous research that supports extraversion as a desirable trait in sales and role overload as a detrimental factor. Instead, we find more nuanced effects that interact with the manager's empathy. Independent replication studies using different samples and methodologies would reinforce the findings and establish their robustness. It would also help identify potential additional boundary conditions associated with the sales environment. Further research may be needed to explore the specific conditions or contexts under which these predictors can lead to tangible improvements in value-based selling behaviors and sales performance within the retail sector.

Fourth, the current study does not extensively investigate the potential negative consequences or challenges associated with creativity in the workplace. Investigating the dark side of creativity, such as the impact on work-life balance, conflicts with colleagues or managers, burnout, privileges, and power dynamics, would provide a more holistic view of the effect of creativity on job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa & McCrae, 2008; Zhou & George, 2001). Adding obsessive passion to the model could probably be beneficial in illustrating this dark side that was considered out of scope in the present research.

Fifth, the reliance on self-reported measures for organizational commitment, extraversion, role overload, empowerment, and job engagement could be susceptible to common-method bias, potentially affecting the validity of the findings. While efforts were made to consider potential biases in these evaluations, such as controlling for tenure under the same manager, subjective assessments may still introduce bias. They may not accurately reflect salespeople's actual performance and ensure the confidentiality of the results. Further research might consider other assessment approaches, such as a combination of managers, salespeople, or even peer evaluations.

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2.7. Appendix

2.7.1. Value-based selling behaviors scenario in retail settings

Customer (C): I am looking for a new fishing reel. Mine doesn't work as well as it used to.

Salesperson (S): Of course, I'd love to help. Let me ask you a few questions to understand your needs better. What type of fishing do you mainly do?

C: I fish mainly in freshwater, lakes, and rivers.

S: Perfect. Do you have a particular species you like to target or a favorite fishing technique?

C: I like to fish for bass, so I often use light spinning reels.

S: Thank you for sharing this information with me. In that case, let me introduce you to a reel that has received great feedback from our customers who share your interests. This model has a high gear ratio and a smooth braking system, perfect for accurate casts and catching beautiful bass. Plus, it's made with water-resistant materials to withstand all kinds of fishing conditions.

C: Sounds promising. But I've noticed that some reels tend to wear out quickly. How does it behave in terms of longevity?

S: Great question. This reel is renowned for its durability. It is designed with high-quality components, and customers have been using this model for years without problems. Plus, it comes with a full warranty for extra peace of mind.

C: I appreciate it. In terms of price, is it competitive?

S: Absolutely. While it may be slightly more expensive than some entry-level reels, it offers exceptional value for its performance. Think of it as a long-term investment in your fishing experience, with fewer replacements needed in the future.

C: You have a good point. I'll take it. But before I go, do you have any tips for maintaining this reel to ensure its durability?

S: Of course. I recommend regular cleaning and lubrication to keep it in tip-top condition. We have maintenance kits and instructional videos available on our website to help you. And don't forget, we offer free workshops for our customers every first Monday of the month to improve their fishing skills. It's all part of our commitment to ensuring you have a great fishing experience.

In this example, the salespeople tackle the three components of value-based selling behaviors. First, we need to focus on understanding the customer's needs. Second, by crafting a value proposition by recommending a product that fits those needs, and finally, by communicating value to the customer by emphasizing its value, addressing the customer's concerns, and offering additional services to improve the overall customer experience, again emphasizing the value gained. This value-based approach to selling aims to provide the customer with a product that not only meets their immediate needs but also provides long-term value.

2.7.2. Scale items and psychometric properties

Organizational commitment (Deconinck & Johnson, 2009) $\alpha = .88$, CR = .89, AVE = .72

1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization.
2. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
3. I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization (Reverse coded).

Extraversion (Farrington, 2012) $\alpha = .76$, CR = .77, AVE = .42

1. I am someone who tends to be quiet (Reverse coded).
2. I am someone who is sometimes shy (Reverse coded).
3. I am someone who is reserved (Reverse coded).
4. I am someone who is talkative.
5. I am someone who is outgoing, sociable.

Role overload (Schaubroeck et al., 1989) $\alpha = .93$, CR = .93, AVE = .81

1. The amount of work I am being asked to do is too much.
2. It seems like I never have enough time to do what I need to do at work.
3. I often feel like I have too much work for one person.

Empowerment (Martin & Bush, 2006) $\alpha = .62$, CR = .62, AVE = .37

1. The work I do is very important to me.
2. I can decide for myself how to do my job.
3. I master the skills necessary for my work.

Job engagement (Rich et al., 2010) $\alpha = .77$, CR = .77, AVE = .53

1. I put in a lot of effort at work.
2. I am passionate about my work.
3. I am focused on my work tasks.

Harmonious passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) $\alpha = .89$, CR = .91, AVE = .58

1. This activity allows me to live a variety of experiences.
2. The new things that I discover with this activity allow me to appreciate it even more.
3. This activity allows me to live memorable experiences.
4. This activity reflects the qualities I like about myself.
5. This activity is in harmony with the other activities in my life.
6. For me it is a passion, that I still manage to control.
7. I am completely taken with this activity.

Creativity (Lussier et al., 2017) $\alpha = .93$, CR = .93, AVE = .73

1. I suggest new ways to achieve goals or objectives.
2. I come up with new and practical ideas to improve sales performance.
3. I exhibit creativity on the job when given the opportunity to.
4. I have new and innovative ideas.
5. I come up with creative solutions to problems.

Value-based selling behaviors (Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih, 2018) $\alpha = .91$, CR = .91, AVE = .78

1. I have the ability to offer good product/service for the price.
2. I have the ability to articulate a product/service worth in time, effort, and money.
3. I have the ability to make customer's feeling of getting his/her money's worth.

Sales performance (Lussier et al., 2021; Martin & Bush, 2006) $\alpha = .90$, CR = .91, AVE = .71

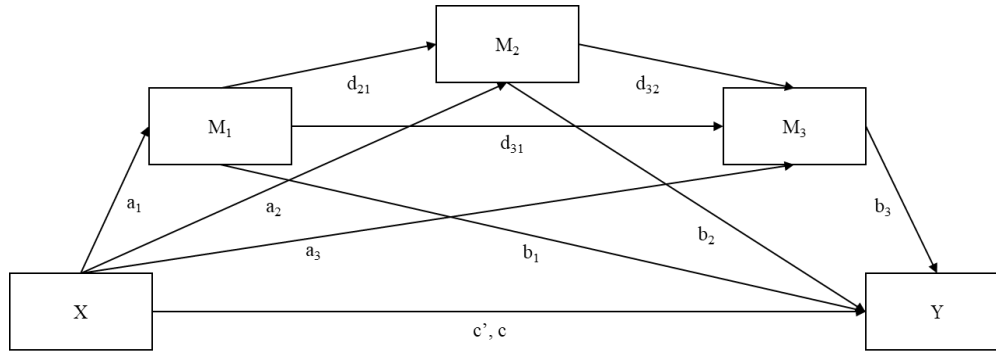
1. This salesperson has a good overall work attitude.
2. This salesperson is effective at solving problems.
3. This salesperson has a good overall job performance.
4. This salesperson has a good selling ability.

Empathy (Agnihotri & Krush, 2015) $\alpha = .84$, CR = .86, AVE = .67

1. I always demonstrate a caring attitude toward other people.
2. I compliment others when they have done something well.
3. I want to help when others encounter problems.
4. When I am upset at someone, I usually try to “put myself in their shoes” for a while.

2.7.3. Post-hoc analyses

Serial mediation with the manager's overall satisfaction with the salesperson as the dependent variable



M1: Harmonious passion, M2: Creativity, M3: Value-based selling behaviors

Fig. 3.6- Model 6 overview

Table 3.9. Summary of results with all variables measured at Time 2 and sales performance as the dependent variable

X	a1	a2	d21	a3	d31	d32	c'	b1	b2	b3	c	IE7	LCI	UCI	IE4	LCI	UCI
OC	.18***	.31***	.37***	.06	.30**	.40***	.06	.01	.19**	-.11*	.11	-.01	-.01	.00	.01	.01	.03
EXT	.12*	.16**	.42***	.12*	.29***	.40***	.06	.01	.20**	-.11*	.08	-.01	-.01	.01	.01	.01	.03
RO	-.13*	.29***	.51***	.14*	.326**	.46***	.09	.04	.18*	-.09	.13**	.01	-.01	.01	.01	-.03	-.01
POW	.20**	.48***	.31***	.22*	.329**	.31**	.25***	.01	.11	.15**	.24***	.01	-.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.02
JE	.27***	.36***	.31**	.09	.28**	.39***	.09	.01	.19**	-.11*	.13*	.01	-.01	-.01	.02	.01	.04

* $\rho < .05$, ** $\rho < .01$, *** $\rho < .001$

OC: Organizational commitment, EXT: Extraversion, RO: Role overload, POW: Empowerment, JE: Job engagement, Y: Sales performance

IE7: Indirect effect X → Harmonious passion → Creativity → Value-based selling behaviors → Sales performance

IE4: Indirect effect X → Harmonious passion → Creativity → Sales performance

Conclusion

The present thesis delves into the realm of small specialty retailers, an industry that has received very little attention in academic research in recent years. Despite their significant contributions to the North American economy (DellaCamera, 2022), these retailers often operate in the shadows of larger brick-and-mortar or online stores. This study recognizes the industry's challenges and aims to shed light on potential solutions, emphasizing the importance of harnessing internal resources to cultivate a passionate and creative workforce.

Previous research efforts have recognized the crucial role played by salespeople's creativity in enhancing productivity (Liu et al., 2016) and have suggested that managers who encourage salespeople's creativity have a greater chance of improving sales performance (Agnihotri et al., 2014). However, our knowledge regarding the factors that motivate salespeople to engage in creative activities and, more importantly, how these creative endeavors translate into performance outcomes remains limited. Notably, Crawford et al. (2022) hinted at the significance of frontline employees' passion, forming our research's basis.

This two-essay thesis addresses these gaps by providing theoretical and empirical evidence of the core process that translates harmonious passion into sales performance through creativity and the adoption of value-based selling behaviors. Additionally, we expand previous research (Agnihotri et al., 2014) by considering a more encompassing range of relevant predictors of this core process and focus mainly on the role of the store manager's empathy as a vital enabler of these antecedents. While some of the hypotheses

we formulated did not find support (refer to Table 4.1), the results sparked an engaging discussion and led to novel insights that are pertinent to both theory and practice.

Table 4.1 – Summary of all hypotheses

Hypothesis		Results
Essay #1		
H1	Salespeople’s creativity mediates the positive relationship between harmonious passion and value-based selling behaviors.	Supported
H2	Salespeople’s value-based selling behaviors mediate the positive relationship between creativity and manager-perceived sales performance.	Supported
H3	The interaction between the store manager’s job engagement and the salespeople’s creativity positively predicts the level of salespeople’s value-based selling behaviors, with a stronger effect creativity on value-based selling behaviors when the store manager displays greater job engagement.	Supported
H4	The interaction between the salespeople’s organizational commitment and the salespeople’s creativity positively predicts the level of salespeople’s value-based selling behaviors, with a stronger effect on creativity when salespeople display greater organizational commitment.	Not supported
H5a	There is a significant positive interaction effect between the store manager’s job engagement and salespeople’s organizational commitment on salespeople’s value-based selling behaviors among highly creative salespeople.	Not supported
H5b	There is a significant negative interaction effect between the store manager’s job engagement and salespeople’s organizational commitment on salespeople’s value-based selling behaviors among less creative salespeople.	Not supported
Essay #2		
H1	The salespeople’s harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based selling behaviors, hereafter referred to as the core process, have a sequential indirect positive effect (i.e., harmonious passion → creativity → value-based selling behaviors) on sales performances as evaluated by the store manager (all measured at Time 2).	Not supported, indirect only through creativity
H2 _a	The salespeople’s organizational commitment at Time 1 is positively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion at Time 2.	Supported
H2 _b	The salespeople’s extraversion at Time 1 is positively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion at Time 2.	Not supported
H2 _c	The salespeople’s role overload at Time 1 is negatively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion at Time 2.	Not supported
H2 _d	The salespeople’s empowerment at Time 1 is positively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion at Time 2.	Supported
H2 _e	The salespeople’s job engagement at Time 1 is positively associated with salespeople’s harmonious passion at Time 2.	Supported
H3 _{a-c}	The indirect effect of the salespeople’s (a) employee organizational commitment, (b) extraversion, (c) role overload, (d) empowerment, and (e) job engagement at Time 1 on sales performances at Time 2 through the core process at Time 2 is positive (negative for (c) role overload) and significant.	Not supported
H4 _{a-c}	The interaction between manager empathy per store and (a) salespeople’s organizational commitment, (b) extraversion, (c) role overload, (d) empowerment, and (e) job engagement at Time 1 positively predicts the salespeople’s level of harmonious passion at Time 2, with a stronger effect of (a), (b), (c), (d), and (e) on harmonious passion expected when the store managers display greater empathy.	H4b and H4c are supported

The first essay meticulously examines the intricate relationship between harmonious passion, creativity, value-based selling behaviors, and individual sales performance. We supplement this investigation by leveraging the dyadic nature of our dataset, focusing on the manager-salespeople relationship. We unveil the interrelationships between salespeople's organizational commitment, the reciprocal response from managers through job engagement, and their impact on the proposed process. Our contribution to the existing literature is multifaceted. Firstly, we integrate concepts from creativity, passion, and sales literature, defining harmonious passion as a crucial intrinsic motivator enabling salespeople's creativity. Our results reveal the value of the sequencing of harmonious passion and creativity in predicting value-based selling behaviors. Next, we contribute to the existing literature on creativity in sales (Agnihotri, 2014) by deconstructing the frequently overlooked concept of value creation. We confirm the relevance of value-based selling behaviors, a concept previously confined to B2B contexts, in retail settings by demonstrating its mediating role in enabling salespeople's creativity to transform into sales performances. Finally, we contribute to existing literature by revealing the social exchange process between the salesperson and its manager, highlighting the importance of reciprocal investments and mutual benefits in achieving desired outcomes within a value-oriented context. Our results uncover that the highest levels of value-based selling behaviors are associated with highly creative individuals, low in organizational commitment, and working under a manager high in job engagement. For individuals low in creativity, organizational commitment has very little effect on value-based selling behaviors, and the store manager's job engagement has virtually no impact. Organizational commitment's rigid nature where the extra effort

directed toward the achievement of organizational goals impedes the freedom required for creativity to fully bloom into desirable sales behaviors, is a key finding. In simple terms, when it comes to small specialty retailers, it is the combination of the salespeople's creativity and the store managers' job engagement that drives sales results, but the organizational commitment of salespeople plays no role in it.

Building upon the foundation laid by the first essay, the second essay expands the scope and explores the antecedents of harmonious passion among salespeople (Agnihotri et al., 2014), incorporating insights from sales literature and managerial empathy. By delving into the interplay between salespeople's characteristics and managerial empathy, the research uncovers additional layers of complexity in understanding and fostering harmonious passion among frontline salespeople. Notably, the findings highlight the pivotal role of the store manager's empathy in influencing employee passion and creativity, particularly in the context of high extraversion and perceived role overload.

Our first contribution to the existing literature lies in replicating the core process elaborated in the first essay and confirming the sequential mediating effect of harmonious passion, creativity, and value-based behaviors. While our second dataset could not provide a significant effect of the core process on sales performance, as rated by the store manager, confirming the first part of the process strengthens the findings of the first essay. This confirmation holds great theoretical and practical value as it explains how passion and creativity are translated into desirable selling behaviors.

Next, we get into the core contribution of this second essay and explore a set of meticulously selected predictors of antecedents to the proposed core process encompassing key characteristics of salespeople in retail settings. We found support for

salespeople's organizational commitment, empowerment, and job engagement in predicting harmonious passion but not for extraversion and role overload.

Introducing the moderating role of the store manager's empathy in the relationship between the antecedents and harmonious passion, we find that the two predictors that did not yield significant direct effects on harmonious passion are the only ones interacting with the manager's empathy. These interactions offer novel insights, particularly regarding highly extroverted salespeople who exhibit the highest levels of harmonious passion when paired with empathic managers. Surprisingly, for salespeople who are low in extraversion, the manager's empathy appears to have minimal impact on harmonious passion, resulting in the lowest levels of passion when combined with a highly empathic manager.

Our results indicate that for extroverts to foster their harmonious passion, both extraversion and the manager's empathy levels must be high. Otherwise, extroverts are not able to channel their efforts into a harmonious passion that feeds creativity. The highest levels of harmonious passion are found in the context of high role overload under a manager with high empathy. Harmonious passion also achieves high scores under low role overload conditions and paired with a manager with low empathy. Conversely, low role overload and an empathic manager extinguished the passion. To get the most out of their creative salespeople, empathic managers could, counterintuitively, increase their subordinates' responsibilities. In contrast, reducing the role overload for salespeople could increase harmonious passion, especially when managers lack empathy.

Overall, the synthesis of findings from both essays, as summarized in Table 4.1, underscores the interconnectedness of salespeople's passion, creativity, and sales

performance within retail organizations. Through a multi-level dyadic perspective and robust methodological approaches, the research contributes to existing literature by providing valuable insights for practitioners and sales scholars, offering actionable recommendations for enhancing sales performances, nurturing salespeople's passion and creativity, and fostering mutually beneficial relationships between salespeople and managers. The thesis sets the stage for further sales research to explore the combined benefits of harmonious passion and creativity and extend sales approaches' knowledge beyond their current boundaries.