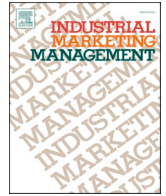




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Research paper

An examination of salesperson bricolage during a critical sales disruption: Selling during the Covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has proven to be a disruptive and world-altering event often forcing professional salespeople to rapidly change the manner in which they do business. Thereby, this pandemic illuminates the importance of understanding salesperson characteristics and behaviors that enable sales success in disruptive environments. This study identifies COVID-19 as a Critical Sales Event and introduces the concept of “bricolage” to the larger body of sales literature. Bricolage is a combination of “making do” under environmental conditions of resource constraint. Bricolage characterizes a salesperson’s ability to utilize available resources effectively by assessing available resources and working to reconfigure them in order to meet new challenges and create opportunities. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative research from professional salespeople, this study identifies a salesperson’s creativity, learning-orientation, and grit as three important antecedents to salesperson bricolage. Moreover, this study shows that salesperson bricolage relates positively to sales performance under conditions shaped by the COVID-19 disruption; with salesperson bricolage becoming more strongly related to sales performance when sales environments are more highly disrupted by the pandemic.

1. Introduction

Unprecedented climate change, American political instability, racial inequality and a global pandemic has shaped 2020 to be one of the most disruptive and challenging environments for American businesses (Oehmen, Locatelli, Wied, & Willumsen, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic in particular, has been a stark reminder that the status quo can rapidly shift (Cankurtaran & Beverland, 2020). This pandemic has shuttered businesses, constrained global supply chains, and fundamentally changed how salespeople interact with customers (Bartik et al., 2020; Craven, Liu, Mysore, & Wilson, 2020; Hartmann & Lussier, 2020). Businesses were required to quickly pivot and alter various aspects of their business strategies and processes (Craven et al., 2020; Pedersen, Ritter, & Di Benedetto, 2020; Sharma, Leung, Kingshott, Dancik, & Cardinali, 2020). However, there is still a great deal of uncertainty surrounding how this dynamic environment effects salespeople and the sales force. For instance, how do salespeople anticipate, adapt, and change in such dynamic environments? How do salespeople leverage these environmental disruptions to meet sales goals? Can certain character traits help navigate disruptions? To help answer these questions,

this paper analyzes how the meta-adaptive concept of “Bricolage” (i.e., the effective leveraging of available resources) influences sales performance when facing environmental challenges.

Sales research has consistently demonstrated that salespeople perform better when they adjust and adapt selling behaviors to fit selling situations (Weitz, 1981). In fact, there are multiple streams of inquiry examining the positive impacts of adaptive selling behaviors (e.g., Franke & Park, 2006; Kimura, Bande, & Fernández-Ferrín, 2019; Spiro & Weitz, 1990), the appropriate use of sales influence tactics (e.g., Hartmann, Plouffe, Kohsuwan, & Cote, 2020; Hochstein, Bolander, Goldsmith, & Plouffe, 2019; McFarland, Challagalla, & Shervani, 2006; McFarland & Dixon, 2019), and customizing value propositions through value-based selling (e.g., Liinamaa et al., 2016; Terho, Eggert, Haas, & Ulaga, 2015; Terho, Haas, Eggert, & Ulaga, 2012; Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). Interestingly, each of these approaches focus exclusively on how salespeople adapt within specific customer interactions and how these alterations improve sales outcomes. None examines how salespeople leverage environmental conditions and adapt to environmental change. While understanding and adjusting to customers is important, when faced with significant environmental disruption, salespeople will likely

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need to adapt more than just their sales interactions. Performance may also require altering territory development strategies, pipeline and call plans, sales processes, and the use of internal and external support resources. In disruptive situations, salespeople may need to rapidly experiment, quickly adapt, and ultimately, become more entrepreneurial (Matthews, Chalmers, & Fraser, 2018). As such, performance may increasingly depend upon a salesperson's ability to innovate and reallocate resources. Thus, this study contributes to emerging literature on macro-adaptive selling strategies (Kwak, Anderson, Leigh, & Bonifield, 2019) by examining salesperson bricolage capabilities.

The concept of bricolage was first articulated by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966, p. 17) as, "making do with what is at hand". Bricolage has seen renewed interest in the areas of strategic management and entrepreneurship with Baker and Nelson (2005, p. 333) specifying bricolage as, "making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities". Fisher (2012) delineates the foundations of entrepreneurial bricolage as (1) making do with what is at hand, and (2) creating something from nothing by combining resources for new purposes. Whereas, Witell et al. (2017) identify bricolage as having four pillars: (1) actively addressing resource scarcity, (2) making do with what is available (3) improvising when recombining resources and (4) networking. Integrating these conceptualizations and others (e.g., Baker, 2007; Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010; Molecke & Pinkse, 2017), we define *salesperson bricolage* as a salesperson's ability to effectively utilize available resources by assessing, reconfiguring, and working to leverage them in order to meet new challenges and create opportunities.

The concept of bricolage holds particular relevance for salespeople. Salespeople are often resource-constrained, over-burdened and deal with varying levels of ambiguity (Verbeke, Dietz, & Verwaal, 2011). In a crisis/disruptive situation such as COVID-19, the notion of "making do" becomes further elevated, altering sales into varying levels of disarray. Utilizing data collected in May 2020, after the first 2 months of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States, this study examines drivers of salesperson performance during a time of disruption. Specifically, it examines how salesperson bricolage impacts performance for salespeople in more disruptive conditions.

2. Bricolage and salesperson adaptations

When environments change, salespeople must adapt (Delpechitre, Gupta, Zadeh, Lim, & Taylor, 2020; Sharma, Rangarajan, & Paesbrugge, 2020). A significant stream of sales research identifies strong enduring associations between the salesperson's ability to adapt to a selling environment and sales performance (Franke & Park, 2006; Ohiomah, Benyoucef, & Andreev, 2020). Interestingly, the bulk of this research narrowly examines only adaptations salespeople make with specific customers (i.e., customer-based adaptations) with only limited exploration of market-based adaptations (Kwak et al., 2019). Specifically, most research attention has to date been focused on the concept of *adaptive selling behaviors*. While the earliest conceptualizations of adaptive selling argue that salesperson performance is a function of both a salesperson's effectiveness in sales interactions and reactions to the macro-environment (Weitz, 1981), subsequent enquiry and the resulting operationalization of adaptive selling has been more customer and micro-focused (e.g., Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Terho et al., 2012). Our review of this literature indicates that a vast majority of this research operationalizes adaptive selling with the customer and interaction-based definition provided by Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan (1986). That is, adaptive selling is "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 et al., 1986, p. 175). Furthermore, adaptive selling research typically utilizes the ADAPTS scale (Spiro & Weitz, 1990) or its shortened version (Robinson Jr., Marshall, Moncrief, & Lassk, 2002) to measure adaptive selling behaviors. These scales assess only micro-level customer interaction

adaptions. Thus, while there is the understanding among sales scholars that adjustments to a macro-environment is important for sales success (Liu, Hochstein, Bolander, Bradford, & Weitz, 2020; Sharma, Rangarajan, & Paesbrugge, 2020), this is largely ignored in current conceptualizations of adaptive selling behaviors.

Interestingly, several recent streams of literature attempting to enrich our understanding of adaptive selling have done so while becoming even more micro-focused. For example, the emerging rich literatures on *salesperson influence tactics* adds to the literature on adaptive selling by providing a framework describing the persuasive communication attempts in sales interactions (McFarland et al., 2006; Pöyry, Parvinen, & McFarland, 2017), with the assumption that certain tactics are both suited for different selling situations (Evans, McFarland, Dietz, & Jaramillo, 2012; Plouffe, Bolander, & Cote, 2014). Likewise, literature examining the concept of *value-based selling* provides insight on the persuasive strength of customizing financial and value-based arguments with customers (Terho et al., 2012; Terho et al., 2015; Töytäri & Rajala, 2015). Academic inquiry into relationship selling (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990), consultative selling (Liu & Leach, 2001), solution selling (Ulaga & Kohli, 2018), and agility selling (Chonko & Jones, 2005) all contribute to this field by identifying effective customer adaptation strategies, yet they are all customer-level micro-adaptations.

To a lesser extent, additional sales literature has diverged from this strictly customer-interaction view of adaptive selling and examine more macro-adaptive strategies of salespeople. These inquiries take a more entrepreneurial view of the selling role and examine how salespeople adapt selling strategies to markets and the environment (Delpechitre et al., 2020). Environmental management research posits that various types of marketing strategies can be implemented in order to better manage a given environment (Clark, Varadarajan, & Pride, 1994; Zeithaml & Zeithaml, 1984). Similarly, Configuration Theory addresses the fit between strategy and situation and posits that strategic fit leads to performance (Vorhies & Morgan, 2003; Yarbrough, Morgan, & Vorhies, 2011). Environmental management and configuration theory have been shown to relate to diverse areas such as, marketing performance (Vorhies & Morgan, 2003), innovation performance (Manu & Sriram, 1996; Stock & Zacharias, 2011), strategic flexibility (Johnson, Lee, Saini, & Grohmann, 2003), and entrepreneurial marketing (Kreiser, Kuratko, Covin, Ireland, & Hornsby, 2019; Morris, Schindehutte, & LaForge, 2002); but less attention has been paid to the idea of strategic environmental management within the sales context. One notable exception is the recent work by Kwak et al. (2019) who utilize configuration theory to examine macro-adaptive selling strategies. In their study, they assert that entrepreneurial salespeople must not only adapt within individual customer encounters but also adapt their strategies to current environmental conditions.

Other noteworthy examples of strategic macro-adaptations include research on salesperson effectuation, and the utilization of sales resources (Wang, Schrock, Kumar, & Hughes, 2020). *Effectuation* is the capability to react to an environment and repeatedly pivot toward successful courses of action (Chandler, DeTienne, McKelvie, & Mumford, 2011; Sarasvathy, 2001). As such, it may be an important mechanism explaining how salespeople deploy their limited resources. When salespeople have a certain level of autonomy (Nguyen, Paswan, & Dubinsky, 2018) and are resource challenged (Mayo & Mallin, 2010), they are often required to make strategic decisions about how to use these resources and adapt. For example, effectively developing and managing the use of internal customers, is but one asset that becomes increasingly important in resource constrained selling environments (Liu et al., 2020). Important for this study, this set of research demonstrates that performance depends on salespeople selecting the right strategies for specific environmental situations.

In truly disruptive environments, where every facet of business is turned upside down, salespeople must use every tool at their disposal and adapt to their environment and their customers. Thus, an important

omission in previous research on adaptive selling is an understanding of how changing resources are reallocated. Bricolage is a salesperson capability bridging both macro and micro-level adaptive selling. A bricoleur's focus on the reassignment of available resources adds nuance and detail to the mechanisms supporting adaptive behavior. On the micro-level, sales bricoleurs will reallocate resources to ensure that customer interactions remain effective. On the macro-level, sales bricoleurs will make strategic adjustments to remain successful. As such, bricolage can enable performance in disruptive environments.

Adjusting to environmental factors at both micro and macro-levels, the sales bricoleur embodies an inhabitant within the ecosystems approach of [Hartmann, Wieland, and Vargo \(2018\)](#). This theoretical framework considers an emergent global perspective on selling and the constant interplay among internal and external factors. It invokes a service ecosystems perspective for sales reinforced by the service-dominant logic originally discussed by [Vargo and Lusch \(2004, 2016\)](#). The service ecosystems perspective advocates that an actor needs to interact within the entirety of the ecosystem. Because bricolage involves adjusting to one's overall network ([Witell et al., 2017](#)) with a focus on resource recombination and ingenuity, the sales bricoleur co-creates value and is a strong candidate for navigating environmental disruptions in the sales ecosystem.

3. The salesperson as bricoleur

To examine bricolage among business-to-business salespeople, we adopted a multi-method methodology. Specifically, we first utilize a discovery oriented, theories-in-use approach ([Terho et al., 2012](#); [Tuli, Kohli, & Bharadwaj, 2007](#); [Zeithaml et al., 2020](#)). That is, we integrate insights from our review of relevant literature on sales adaptations with generated insights from practitioners to develop sound understandings of how bricolage fits among related adaptive selling constructs while identifying key salesperson capabilities that enable salesperson bricolage. This approach is particularly suited for this study as our careful review of scholarly research in these domains provides a lack of clear insight into bricolage related adaptations among salespeople ([Zeithaml et al., 2020](#)). We then develop testable hypotheses with revealed insights and empirically examine them utilizing confirmatory survey methods.

3.1. Practitioner insights

To examine the concept of bricolage during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, we gathered qualitative data via in-depth interviews with experienced salespeople; several having management responsibilities. We carefully curated our sample in attempt to select practitioners from (1) a variety of industries and markets to gain a rich description of our phenomenon, and (2) organizations with salespeople impacted by the pandemic in varied important ways (see [Table 1](#)). We conducted interviews until identifying noticeable saturation (i.e., information redundancy). Our resulting sample comprises 12 sales organizations; a sample size consistent with recommendations for exploratory research ([McCracken, 1988](#)). It consists of organizations representing manufacturing, wholesaling, and business services from across the United States. The sample represents industries such as pharmaceuticals, IT, contract manufacturing, marketing, building and construction, and food manufacturing. We sought diversity in the function and organizational level of respondents. As such, respondents occupied positions ranging from account representative and director to Chief Sales Officer.

We utilized open questions and structured interviews to collect data. Interviews ranged from forty minutes to an hour and fifteen and generated 161 pages of transcribed text. We asked respondents to provide specific examples whenever possible and interview questions focused on specific adaptations made due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Follow-up interview questions sought to capture insight into salesperson capabilities the facilitated each adaptation. We utilized grounded theory coding methods that involves open, axial, and selective coding to

Table 1

Profiles of companies and managers participating in the qualitative study.

Firm	Job Title	Industry	Sales ^a	Employees
Manufacturer 1	Director of Sales	Contract manufacturing	5	22
Manufacturer 2	Director of Sales	Specialized pharmaceuticals	16,890	42,535
Manufacturer 3	VP Sales	Food manufacturing	11,400	35,700
Manufacturer 4	VP Sales	IT infrastructure	828	145
Wholesaler 1	Sales Manager	Building material	5	6200
Wholesaler 2	Account Representative	Building material	5	6200
Wholesaler 3	Owner	Food and Beverage	657	75
Wholesaler 4	Sales Manager	Construction material	22,100	35,575
Business Service 1	Director of Sales	Sports partnerships	460	312
Business Service 2	Chief Sales Officer	Marketing services	470	292
Business Service 3	Key Account Manager	Health services	710	1800
Business Service 4	Account Representative	IT services	755	2230

^a In \$US millions.

facilitate analysis and interpretation of the interviews ([Flint, Woodruff, & Gardial, 2002](#); [Johnson, 2015](#)).

3.1.1. Covid-19 resource reallocation results in macro- and micro-adaptation

Without exception, each of our face-to-face interviews with practitioners indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic upended the status quo and altered their businesses in serious and important ways. Two recurring themes were: (1) Covid-19 rapidly changed the availability and importance of many selling resources, and (2) reacting to Covid-19 required salespeople to undertake both macro and micro-level adaptations. Notably, these themes reveal that the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in salesperson bricolage; as practitioners engaged in adapting their strategies and customer interactions based on assessing and leveraging available resources.

Resources that our respondents had previously taken for granted became unavailable, while underutilized resources became critical for continued success. Specifically, they identified losing the ability to interact with customers in-person and travel as important lost resources. Many respondents previously relied on bringing customers to visit their facilities in order to create excitement and/or demonstrate value; the pandemic put a swift end to these activities. For others, entire customer segments virtually disappeared and access to customary supply-chains and products became constrained. On the other hand, respondents acknowledged the new importance of previously underutilized communication technologies. Sales practitioners identified Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and other video conferencing and video capturing programs as critical new resources for engaging with customers. They also identified the importance of developing stronger or different relationships with internal customers and other stakeholders, specifically with members of marketing and product fulfillment. Others identified the need to develop overlooked or underdeveloped market segments. Others still, described how they had to pivot and rely more heavily on sales-channel intermediaries. In sum, our interviews with practitioners illustrate a variety of ways that Covid-19 dramatically altered the resources available to salespeople and the need to adjust to this change in resources.

As the Covid-19 pandemic altered the sales environment and salespeople adapted to an altered set of resources and resource constraints, salespeople made both micro and macro adaptations. That is, our respondents identified both ways that they were adapting their specific

customer interactions as well as adaptations they were making to better leverage the transformed marketplace. Customer-focused micro-adaptations often focused on effectively utilizing remote technologies and making appropriate alterations to transfer selling encounters to on-line platforms. The quotes below illustrate how salespeople were adapting their sales interactions to their new environment.

Business service 1: We don't know if we are going to have a NFL season this year. Without fans in attendance, we cannot deliver level of value expected by our current partners. Our new philosophy has been to amend and extend; amend agreements with current partners so that it's positive for both sides. Every single call has been, "Hey, either I gave you a year off, or can you give me a year on the other end of the deal and we're extending our partnership out a year? Or hey, our deal is up in two years, why don't we just extend now?" And that started back probably two weeks after Covid really hit and we had to go home.

Manufacturer 4: I've been adjusting to working from home, but the other part is the buyer has not ever moved back into the office, so our biggest customers, they haven't opened their offices yet. Even if I was allowed to, I couldn't travel to see them. We are a relationship business that hasn't changed much in twenty years. So trying to bring that experience that traditionally we would give in person to someone virtually on a Zoom call; it has been a challenge. We're getting into Zoom backdrops and branded backdrops to make it a little more personal. We are also sending a lot of gifts, so we are always asking for addresses; which was awkward initially, but they now get why we are asking.

In addition to adapting sales interactions, salespeople also adapted their business strategies. As governments mandated remote work and closed large sections of the service industry, customers become more difficult to engage while others effectively vanished. At the same time, suppliers became less reliable as global supply chains grounded to a halt. Many manufacturing suppliers stopped manufacturing specialty products to focus on key products and brands. To be effective in this constrained environment, salespeople had to rethink how they approach their markets and how to leverage their resources to attain goals. Our respondents identified numerous examples where salespeople were adapting to new constraints by altering their sales objectives, the customers that they called on, the products they sold, and the sales-channels they emphasized. Thus, disruptions from the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in salespeople adapting goal attainment strategies to their macro-environment as illustrated by the quotes below.

Business service 3: We like to sell to large business directly but we also partner with health consultants. Often these consultants have existing relationships with customers and working through them allows us access. I would say that I was lucky; I had strong relationships with my consultants. It has become really difficult to reach customers directly so I've had to rely more on these indirect channels. For salespeople who didn't have strong relations [with consultants], I think that they have had a harder time.

Manufacturer 3: For the past twenty-five years, half of food has been eaten in restaurants and half from retail. Restaurants shut down across the country and in almost every state because government's mandated complete change. Then, retail picked up as no one left their home, right? Then the hoarding! The food service and retail supply chain is about four to five days of availability, so we could not get enough retail product to grocery stores. At the same time, we have a huge uptick in school lunch programs but instead of needing proteins for onsite preparation, they wanted something for curbside pick-up. So, today I spend all my time on government and retail customers. I have also had to learn how to work with the marketing team to provide feedback on school orders for their product development. We really had to pivot together. Marketing was use to relying on historical data for our marketing plans. Now, they have to

rely on me and what I'm leaning about our customers to market to a new channel or new opportunity.

Wholesaler 4: We were dumping kegs of beer that expired because our on-premise market [bars and restaurant] just collapsed. Sales reps had to adjust and focus efforts on servicing our retail customers.

In sum, findings clearly illustrate the use of salesperson bricolage in a time of disruption. During the onset of the pandemic, salespeople experienced important constraints and alterations to available resources requiring them to adapt. Thus, salesperson adaptations were the result of a resource reallocation whereby salespeople assessed the resources available and then leveraged them to meet the challenges of this disruptive sales environment. Furthermore, adaptations pertained not only to customer interactions, but also included altering more macro-level sales strategies. For example, salespeople experienced rapid change in the opportunities provided by customer segments, the availability of and demand for products, and the value of internal customers and intermediaries. Salespeople, thereby, altered the type of customer they called on, the products they sold, and the non-customer relationships they developed. For these reasons, an appropriate construct to examine adaptive selling during this crisis is salesperson bricolage.

3.1.2. Salesperson capabilities enabling bricolage

In describing bricolage activities, sales practitioners identify several important characteristics and capabilities enabling bricolage. Again, two general themes emerged from these dialogues. First, a salesperson's ability and confidence to creatively experiment supports bricolage. Secondly, bricolage benefits from remaining action oriented in the face of frustrations and failures. Thus, while established frameworks of salesperson performance consistently support both salesperson ability and motivation as key drivers of success (Churchill Jr., Ford, Hartley, & Walker Jr., 1985), our interviews suggest that salesperson ability and motivation also facilitate salesperson bricolage.

Practitioners emphasized the need to think out-side of the box when engaging in bricolage. They advocated adopting things that work, while discarding ideas that do not. Thus, creative experimentation drives bricolage and requires salespeople to be both creative as well as learning oriented. Salesperson creativity is evidenced by identifying new or neglected problems and generating and evaluating new solutions (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004). Whereas, a learning orientation is a concern with increasing one's abilities and extending mastery (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). The quotes below illustrate how salesperson creatively and a learning orientation aid bricolage.

Manufacturer 1: I took it upon myself, if I'm going to get proficient at hosting presentations and virtual tours, then I'm going to go learn these products inside and out. Knowing the tools inside and out enabled me to actually host quality virtual tours and show our customers and prospects how our manufacturing equipment actually works and the value in machining products. We're finding other creative ways to engage with our customers and "open our doors" and show them what we're doing.

Business service 3: We are still seeing some customers face-to-face but use teleconferencing for others. It's not Zoom; it's called Veeva Engage. It's a different format and our customers have to download the app and figure it out. One thing I've been doing is during my face-to-face interactions, I ask to download and set up the program for them live in their office, saying, "You guys might get COVID through here and you're all going to be doing telemedicine from home, so, let's know the format. I'm going to show it to you and let's do it here now." This way, they are prepared and our relationship is uninterrupted if things go south.

Wholesaler 2: I would say in times of crisis, we had to get creative, right? So we had virtual showrooms that our corporate team helped us with where you could log in and basically tour a virtual showroom. I was used to taking a customer over to product X and product

Y in the showroom and doing the comparisons. Now I was forced to recreate my system and come up with different ways. Whether it was sending an email with just the pros and cons, or highlighting differences over the phone. I had to figure out what worked because that is how I get paid. I think as a general rule, if closing sales is how you get paid, you get creative and figure it out.

When engaging in bricolage, practitioners acknowledged their need to effectively manage their motivation. Determination, persistence, perseverance, and tenacity were all common words used to describe their commitment to realigning resources. Salesperson bricolage often results in frustrations and setbacks; therefore, maintaining sales efforts under these challenges requires determination. This suggests that salesperson grit can benefit the bricoleur. Originally conceptualized by Duckworth et al. (2007, p. 1087), grit is defined as, “Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously towards challenges, maintaining interest and effort despite failure, adversity and plateaus in progress”. Below are example quotes illustrating how bricolage is facilitated by salesperson grit.

Manufacturer 1: I’m a customer-facing salesman and when I hired on, that’s what they hired me to do. That was expected of me as part of my job responsibility and achieving revenue. The day the pandemic hit, immediately my customer-facing role became no more. Almost overnight, I became a telemarketer, which is a completely different type of selling. Now I’m becoming a dialer and I am literally dialing contact after contact after contact. I could have tucked my tail and said this is not what you hired me to do; or, I could “butch up”, for lack of a better term, and say, “Let’s go make something out of this.”

Manufacturer 3: I don’t know how to sell chicken nuggets in a box for somebody to pick up curbside! I know how to get them to schools in ten-pound cases. Times were frustrating. However, I was determined to figure it out. I am dealing with a volume problem, new customer demands, and a more complex channel. I quickly figured out what I didn’t know and had to pivot. It is a challenge.

Wholesaler 2: You have to be hungry and you have to be willing. You have to be a solutions person, not an end of the road person. When suppliers fail and product is out of stock and there’s nowhere else you can go, you have to be creative and figure out how to source parts from another place? You just have to be hungry and driven and hard working. Put your nose down and just go to work.

During a time of disruption, status quo salesperson capabilities and strategies may no longer be enough and adapting to environmental shifts in resources is critical. Thus, disruptive events may require different skills in order to succeed or even maintain certain levels of performance. Our research identifies salesperson bricolage as one of these critical new capabilities. Furthermore, our data illustrates how some salespeople may be more capable of bricolage than others. Specifically, salespeople who are more creative, learning oriented, and gritty may be particularly prone to be effective bricoleurs. Below we develop hypotheses pertaining to how bricolage affects salesperson performance during a disruptive sales event, and further develop three identified antecedent capabilities enabling salesperson bricolage (i.e., salesperson creativity, learning orientation, and grit).

4. A model of the Covid-19 disruption and salesperson bricolage

Turbulence, disruption and dynamism are integral aspects of the business world. Toward this end, what happens when exogenous shocks rearrange markets? When sweeping “stay-in-place” orders are mandated and business has to occur via Zoom and other tele-formats? When the unemployment rate more than doubles overnight, and demand, supply and even business survival are minute-to-minute? COVID-19 is by any definition disruptive.

Past research identifies numerous types of environmental challenges

and disruptions influencing selling behaviors; commonly utilized environmental constructs in the sales literature being market turbulence (e.g., Chonko, Jones, Roberts, & Dubinsky, 2002), market dynamism (e.g., Wang & Miao, 2015), environmental uncertainty (e.g., Kwak et al., 2019), and even COVID-19 (Hartmann et al., 2020). However, there is still little consensus on the distinction among these environmental challenges. Important to this study, recent work delineates these many forms of instability into components of risk (i.e., manageable change because it can be estimated with varying degrees of probability) and uncertainty (Jia, Cai, & Xu, 2014; Oehmen et al., 2020; Sharma, Leung, et al., 2020). Uncertainty being less manageable because it lacks future probabilities (Morris, Hansen, & Pitt, 1995). In this study we are interested in the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, thus, we are examining the influence of a disruption whose impact is unpredictable, and thereby, uncertain (Sharma, Leung, et al., 2020).

External conditions matter greatly for salespeople. For example, purchase complexity and market dynamism can have deleterious effects on sales force morale (Panagopoulos, Hochstein, Baker, & Pimentel, 2018). However, salespeople can benefit from uncertainty if they adapt to newly acquired information (Syam, Hess, & Yang, 2016). Thus, adaptive skills can be more critical under certain environmental conditions, and the selling situation can moderate the relationship between adaptive selling behaviors and sales performance metrics (Porter, Wiener, & Frankwick, 2003).

Banin et al. (2016, p. 120) argue that in an “uncertainty-laden competitive landscape”, the impact of emergent selling abilities is likely to explain performance better than current established constructs. Baker and Nelson (2005, p. 353) contend that the starting point of bricolage is a penurious environment; defined as, “(one) that presents new challenges, whether opportunities or problems, without providing new resources”. This definition accurately describes COVID-19; and Baker and Nelson (2005) further argue that in a penurious environment, entrepreneurs have three options, (1) seek outside resources, (2) avoid new challenges or (3) engage in bricolage. Our qualitative findings support the use of bricolage by salespeople when adapting to disruptive environments and altered resources. Therefore, bricolage is a macro-adaptive capability that should aid salespeople under conditions of disruption and environmental uncertainty. Thus, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1A. In the disruptive Covid-19 environment, there is a positive relationship between bricolage and sales performance.

H1B. For salespeople who perceive the Covid-19 pandemic to be more disruptive, the relationship between salesperson bricolage and Covid-19 performance is more strongly positive.

4.1. Enabling capabilities

Drawing from our qualitative inquiry, we examine three salesperson capabilities that can facilitate and enable bricolage. Specifically, salesperson learning orientation, grit, and creativity. Bricolage implies a form of creative, determined intelligence suggesting the importance of these three antecedents discussed below.

4.1.1. Salesperson creativity

Salesperson creative performance was first defined by Wang & Netemeyer, 2004, p. 805) as, “the amount of new ideas generated or behaviors exhibited by the salesperson in performing his/her job activities”. Several studies have illustrated the positive role creativity plays in sales (Wang & Miao, 2015). For example, in boundary-spanner service contexts, creativity leads to both better problem-solving and performance (Agnihotri, Rapp, Andzulis, & Gabler, 2014). Groza, Locander, and Howlett (2016) find that a salesperson’s organizational and industry knowledge are important for translating creativity into sales performance. Further highlighting the general importance of

creative solutions, Lussier, Grégoire, and Vachon (2017) find that the ability of a B2B salesperson to generate creative solutions might be more important to sales performance than relational factors.

Creativity has previously been identified as an antecedent of bricolage (An, Zhao, Cao, Zhang, & Liu, 2018). Sales bricoleurs engage in reassessing resources and determining how to best exploit these resources. Salesperson creativity can aid these endeavors and foster the types of reconfigured solutions which drive performance under conditions of resource constraint. Examples from our qualitative inquiry indicate that creativity supports bricolage and illustrate how salespeople are finding creative ways to leverage resources to interact with customers and demonstrate value. Because the recombination of resources often requires creativity (An et al., 2018), we propose the following.

H2. Salesperson creativity is positively related to salesperson bricolage.

4.1.2. Learning orientation

A learning orientation motivates salespeople to engage in planning, alter sales approaches in keeping with situational considerations, and have the confidence to enact a variety of sales approaches (Sujan, Weitz, & Kumar, 1994). Learning-oriented salespeople have been shown to succeed in a large variety of differing sales contexts (Kohli, Shervani, & Challagalla, 1998; Park, Kim, Dubinsky, & Lee, 2010). For example, they better adapt to organizational change (Ahearne, Lam, Mathieu, & Bolander, 2010), they are more efficacious at value-based selling (Terho, Eggert, Ulaga, Haas, & Böhm, 2017) and better utilize social media for sales purposes (Itani, Agnihotri, & Dingus, 2017).

At their core, the bricoleur is both resourceful and achievement-focused. An et al. (2018, p. 51) redefine bricolage as, “a concrete activity of experiential resource learning that creates subjective knowledge of the resources at hand.” Bricolage encourages innovation through two distinct means: a bias for action and recombination of resources (Senyard, Baker, Steffens, & Davidsson, 2014). Furthermore, Harris, Mowen, and Brown (2005) show that a learning orientation leads to a customer orientation; which fits into the relational/networking aspect of bricolage. Furthermore, our qualitative findings provide evidence of salespeople learning from experimentation. These included new ways of working with customers, to pivoting toward different market segments and products. It seems that determining what works in dynamic environments with altered resources requires some trial and error and adopting things that work. This suggests that bricolage is supported by experimentation and a need to “figure it out”. As such, salesperson bricolage can benefit from, and may even require a learning orientation. Thus, we propose the following:

H3. Salesperson learning orientation is positively related to salesperson bricolage.

4.1.3. Grit

Originally conceptualized by Duckworth et al. (2007, p. 1087), grit is defined as, “Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously towards challenges, maintaining interest and effort despite failure, adversity and plateaus in progress”. Grit is considered an effort trait and is situated within the larger body of goal research (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). It has been shown to improve performance in a diverse array of endeavors. Specifically, grit has been shown to improve success of entrepreneurial ventures (Mueller, Wolfe, & Syed, 2017), nurses during a disaster (Tyer-Viola, 2019), and general goal-achievement (Vazsonyi et al., 2019). It thereby, differs from the social persuasion process of dealing with resistant prospects (Chaker, Zablah, & Noble, 2018). In sales, the grit has been positively related to job satisfaction and sales performance (Dugan, Hochstein, Rouziou, & Britton, 2019). Gritty salespeople are less likely to quit in the face of adversity and more loyal to employers (Boyer, Fleming, Rodriguez, & Cohen, 2020; Rodriguez, Boyer, Fleming, & Cohen, 2019).

Baker and Nelson (2005) identify the bricoleur’s refusal to accept constraints and limitations as important aspects of bricolage. Facing challenges, a sales bricoleur will depend on his or her persistence for attaining goals and this drive will intensify bricolage as grit underlies the tenacity to persevere under difficulty. Our qualitative findings support the importance of grit to the sales bricoleur. Not only did these findings illustrate how bricolage is often frustrating, but they also identified that being determined, driven, and hardworking what allows salespeople to engage in bricolage and realign resources for success. Thus, similar to Dugan et al. (2019), we examine the perseverance dimension of grit and propose the following:

H4. Salesperson grit is positively related to salesperson bricolage.

5. Methodology

5.1. Sample

The sample for this study was acquired from a business-to-business outside sales panel provided by Qualtrics panel services. Our sample consists of four hundred and four (404) American outside sales professionals from different companies and across various industries, each with more than 3 years of sales experience and selling exclusively to business customers. Seventy-one percent (71%) of the sample is male with average of 10.7 years in their current position (see Table 1 for sample characteristics).

5.2. Measurement

5.2.1. Constructs and scales

Most constructs for this study are measured utilizing established scales or scales modestly adapted to fit the research context. Specifically, the measurement of bricolage (Davidsson, Baker, & Senyard, 2017), creativity (Wang & Netemeyer, 2004), learning orientation (Sujan et al., 1994), and grit (Duckworth et al., 2007) were adopted from established scales. An established scale for salesperson performance was adapted to capture performance since the Covid-19 pandemic; specifically March and April 2020 (Behrman & Perreault Jr., 1982), while a new scale was

Table 2
Survey sample characteristics.

N	400	
Sex	Male	71 %
	Female	29 %
Age	Less than 20	0 %
	20–39	23 %
	40–59	46 %
	60+	31 %
Years in sales	3–5	13 %
	5–10	21 %
	10–20	25 %
	20+	42 %
Years in current position	0–5	38 %
	5–10	27 %
	10–20	22 %
	20+	13 %
Business/Industry	Professional and business services	37 %
	Industrial manufacturing	17 %
	Medical, Tech and biotech products or services.	12 %
	Agriculture.	1 %
	Consumer products manufacturing	8 %
Typical customer	Wholesaler	14 %
	Other	10 %
	Manufacturers	18 %
	Distributors and wholesalers	18 %
	Retailers	17 %
	Service Providers	22 %
	Governments and nonprofits	7 %
Other	18 %	

developed to capture perceived Covid-19 disruptiveness (see Table 2).

Reliability estimates were computed to be: 0.91 for salesperson bricolage, 0.94 for salesperson creativeness, 0.93 for learning orientation, 0.92 for salesperson grit, 0.90 for salesperson performance, and 0.78 for the perceived disruptiveness of Covid-19. Statistical comparisons between early and late respondents evaluated the potential for non-response bias (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). Findings showed no significant differences between early and late respondents in sales experience, percentage goal achieved, gender, age, industry category, or type of business customer.

5.2.2. Measurement model

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed including all the measurement items in the hypothesized model. Initial CFA results showed adequate fit (CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, GFI = 0.85, RMSEA = 0.05, $\chi^2 = 1313.86$, and $df = 614$). Judicious re-specification of measurement constraints was made in order to ensure the unidimensionality of constructs and achieve an acceptable fit for the measurement model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The resulting measurement model fit statistics were CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.96, GFI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.05, $\chi^2 = 752.66$ and $df = 390$. See Table 2 for measurement model estimates.

Discriminant validity was assessed by systematically constraining correlations between two latent factors to unity, and evaluating the resulting change in chi-square (Bagozzi, 1980). The chi-square difference statistic for each of these tests indicated discriminant validity among the latent factors. Additionally, based on the recommendations of Voorhees, Brady, Calantone, and Ramirez (2016), and Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015) we have conducted tests to assess discriminant validity using the AVE-SV test and the heterotrait-heteromethod and monotrait-heteromethod (HTMT). Providing further support for the discriminant validity among constructs, these results demonstrate that the square root value of AVE is greater than all inter-construct correlations and the ratio of HTMT correlations is less than the 0.85 cutoff value (range 0.04–0.58). See Table 3 for construct correlations and descriptive statistics.

To minimize potential common method bias throughout the model, we adopted several procedural and statistical remedies from Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003). First, we assured confidentiality to respondents and survey construction followed guidelines for creating psychological separations among measured constructs. Additionally, we statistically examined common method bias in multiple ways. First, we employed a single factor test to determine if a single factor accounts for a large portion of variance across all variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Widaman, 1985); the specified six-factor measurement model performs better than a single factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4636.39$, $\Delta df = 10$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, including a common method factor (CMF) in the structural model indicates that a method factor accounts for less than 15% of total variance (Rindfleisch, Malter, Ganesan, & Moorman, 2008); far less than the 25% observed in the meta-analytic investigation of Williams, Cote, and Buckley (1989). Next, we utilized a CLF test and compared the standardized regression weights with and without the common factor. Differences in the regression weights were all less than established thresholds (i.e., <0.2) (Archimi, Reynaud, Yasin, & Bhatti, 2018). These analyses all suggest that common methods did not significantly bias our results.

5.3. Hypothesis testing

5.3.1. Structural model

To impose the hypothesized pattern of relationships in the proposed model, structural parameters were allowed to vary freely or were fixed to zero. We controlled for salesperson age, gender, sales experience, and time in current sales position. After controlling for these variables, the results of the structural equation model showed that the proposed structural model fits well with the data (CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.97, GFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.04, $\chi^2 = 545.752$, $df = 292$). See Table 4 for structural

Table 3
Measurement of constructs.

Model construct and items	α	CFA SFL
Salesperson bricolage	0.91	
I usually find workable solutions to new challenges by using our existing resources.		0.82**
I use any existing resource that seems useful to responding to a new problem or opportunity		0.83**
When I face new challenges I put together workable solutions from existing resources		0.83**
I combine resources to accomplish new challenges that the resources were not originally intended to accomplish.		0.74**
To deal with new challenges I access resources at low or no cost and combine them with what I already have.		0.69**
When dealing with new problems or opportunities I immediately take action by assuming that I will find a workable solution.		0.80**
I deal with new challenges by applying a combination of our existing resources and other resources inexpensively available to me.		0.78**
Salesperson creativity	0.94	
How often do you engage in the following behaviors and thoughts? ...		
Making sales presentations in innovative ways		0.77**
Carrying out sales tasks in ways that are resourceful.		0.88**
Coming up with new idea for satisfying customer needs.		0.93**
Generating and evaluating multiple alternatives for novel customer problems.		0.88**
Generating creative new selling ideas.		0.88**
Learning orientation	0.93	
It is worth spending a great deal of time learning new approaches for dealing with customers.		0.73**
An important part of being a good salesperson is continually improving your sales skills.		0.89**
I put in a great deal of effort sometimes in order to learn something new.		0.89**
It is important for me to learn from each selling experience I have.		0.89**
Learning how to be a better salesperson is of fundamental importance to me.		0.91**
Salesperson grit	0.92	
I have achieved a goal that took years of work.		0.77**
I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.		0.88**
I finish whatever I begin.		0.80**
I am a hard worker.		0.89**
I am diligent.		0.85**
Salesperson post disruption performance	0.90	
How did you perform in the following areas since the COVID-19 crisis began? During these past 2 months ...		
I have been able to generate high dollar sales better than other salespeople in my organization have.		0.89**
I have been able to maintain the profitability of my territory better than other salespeople in my organization have.		0.89**
I have been able to develop strong customer relationships better than other salespeople in my organization have.		0.68**
I have been able to exceed sales targets and objectives for my territory better than other salespeople in my organization have.		0.90**
Perceived Covid-19 disruptiveness	0.78	
How has COVID-19 impacted your business ...		
Because of Covid-19 my business will never be the same.		0.62**
Covid-19 was a huge shock.		0.69**
Covid-19 drastically changed how I approach my business.		0.74**
Covid-19 is not that big of a deal for me ^a .		0.53**
Measurement Model Goodness of Fit Statistics		
Chi-square/df	540.96/289	
CFI/TLI/GFI/RMSEA	0.959/0.964/0.906/0.048	

** $p < 0.01$.

^a Item recoded.

relationships among constructs.

Hypotheses were statistically examined by testing the null hypothesis that the corresponding parameter in the structural model is zero. Because the hypotheses pertaining to non-zero parameters were tested simultaneously in the structural model, a multi-stage Bonferroni procedure involving a more conservative significance level test was

Table 4
Construct correlations.

	Mean	sd	#items	1	2	3	4	5
Salesperson Bricolage	4.56	1.11	7					
Salesperson Creativity	5.01	1.50	5	0.18**				
Learning Orientation	4.63	1.39	5	0.58**	0.11*			
Salesperson Grit	4.68	1.47	5	0.52**	0.03	0.58**		
Post Disruption Performance	3.57	1.58	4	0.34**	0.15**	0.25**	0.19**	
Perceived Covid-19 Disruptiveness	2.95	1.37	4	0.17**	−0.04	0.19**	0.18**	−0.17**

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.

imposed. This procedure resulted in rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting that all parameters were nonzero at an alpha level of at least 0.05 for all four parameters tested.

Thus, findings of this study suggest that salespersons' bricolage capabilities help drive performance and are facilitated by additional salesperson capabilities. Specifically, salespeople who reported being more creative exhibited higher levels of bricolage ($H_4: \gamma = 0.14; p < 0.01$; creativity \rightarrow bricolage). Salespeople who are more learning oriented reported higher levels of bricolage ($H_2: \gamma = 0.41; p < 0.01$; learning orientation \rightarrow bricolage). Likewise, those with higher levels of grit reported higher levels of bricolage ($H_3: \gamma = 0.28; p < 0.05$; grit \rightarrow bricolage). Together, these three antecedent salesperson capabilities account for 41% of the variance in salesperson bricolage ($SMC = 0.41$). Furthermore, bricolage generally improved salesperson performance ($H_{1a}: \gamma = 0.34; p < 0.01$; bricolage \rightarrow performance); this relationship will be further examined below (Table 5).

5.3.2. Testing moderating effect of the Covid-19 disruption

In order to examine the moderating effect of the Covid-19 disruption, we used the well-established two group analysis method for examining moderator effects in structural models (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Iacobucci, 2001; Palmatier, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 2007). Salespeople were separated in to high and low disruptiveness groups using a median

Table 5
Structural relationships among constructs.

	Full Sample	Perceived Covid-19 Disruptiveness		$\Delta\chi^2$
		Low	High	
	SE	SE	SE	
Structural Paths				
Salesperson Bricolage \rightarrow Post Disruption Performance	0.34** <i>H1A</i>	0.18**	0.63**	8.10** <i>H1B</i>
Salesperson Creativity \rightarrow Salesperson Bricolage	0.14** <i>H2</i>	0.16*	0.12*	
Learning Orientation \rightarrow Salesperson Bricolage	0.41** <i>H3</i>	0.35**	0.40**	
Salesperson Grit \rightarrow Salesperson Bricolage	0.28** <i>H4</i>	0.24**	0.35**	
Correlations				
Salesperson Creativity \leftrightarrow Salesperson Grit	0.03	0.01	0.08	
Salesperson Creativity \leftrightarrow Learning Orientation	0.11*	0.07	0.12	
Salesperson Grit \leftrightarrow Learning Orientation	0.58**	0.50**	0.65**	
Structural Model Goodness of Fit Statistics				
n	404	223	181	
Chi-square/df	545.75/292	993.84/605		
CFI/TLI/GFI/RMSEA	0.970/0.966/0.905/0.046	0.955/0.950/0.848/0.040		

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.

split of a summed five-item disruptiveness scale (see Table 2 for scale items). Moderation is examined by evaluating a chi-square difference test between two nested models: one where the hypothesized relationship is constrained to be equal across groups, and one where these can vary across groups. The results of this analysis indicate that the strength of the positive relationship between salesperson bricolage and performance is dependent upon how disruptive the environment has become (see Fig. 1 and Table 4). Specifically, the result shows that bricolage is more highly related to salesperson performance in more disruptive sales environments ($H_{1b}: \Delta\chi^2 = 8.10, \Delta df = 1, p < 0.01$). For salespeople who perceived the Covid-19 pandemic to be highly disruptive, their ability to be a bricoleur strongly affected performance and bricolage explained 62% of the variance in post disruption salesperson performance ($\gamma = 0.62, p < 0.01, SMC = 0.62$). Comparatively, the positive relationship between bricolage and performance was attenuated for salespeople perceiving Covid-19 to be less disruptive on their business ($\gamma = 0.18, p < 0.01, SMC = 0.04$) (Fig. 2).

6. Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered how firms examine volatility in market environments. While assessing and managing market risks remain important, understanding the tools, processes, and capabilities required to effectively pivot and respond to uncertainty has become salient and paramount. Selling firms are not only grappling with responding to Covid-19, but also how to prepare for the next critical environmental disruption. Our warming planet will likely produce larger and more frequent national disasters, our economic global dependence will elevate the impact of trade disputes, and we can expect future pandemics.

This study identifies and examines salesperson bricolage as one potential capability to improve the effective navigation of critical environmental disruptions. Bricolage is both a micro and a macro-adaptive characteristic that should allow salespeople in rapidly and unpredictably changing environments to reassess and reconfigure resources in ways to react opportunistically to their new normal. Our findings demonstrate that salesperson bricolage is an important characteristic whose value increases in highly disruptive environments. This suggests that being a bricoleur can benefit salespeople by either allowing them to mitigate the negative affect of a disruption and/or pivot and leverage resources in a changing environment for success.

Because of these unique abilities, the sales bricoleur meaningfully contributes to the growing body of literature which investigates the intersection of entrepreneurship and marketing (e.g., de Jong, Zacharias, & Nijssen, 2021; Webb, Ireland, Hitt, Kistruck, & Tihanyi, 2011). This focus brings light to a recent paper by Fehrer (2020), who contends that marketing needs to focus more closely on real-world phenomena. Recent sales scholarship has placed emphasis on complex and intertwined processes (Hartmann et al., 2018); unique frontline configurations and service/sales ambidexterity (Hughes & Ogilvie, 2020; Shiue, Tuncdogan, Wang, & Bredican, 2021; Yu, Patterson, & de Ruyter, 2013); fractal complexity (Plouffe, Bolander, Cote, & Hochstein, 2016); and rapidly evolving, solution-driven selling (Tuli et al., 2007). By introducing bricolage into the sales domain, this current paper enters into a

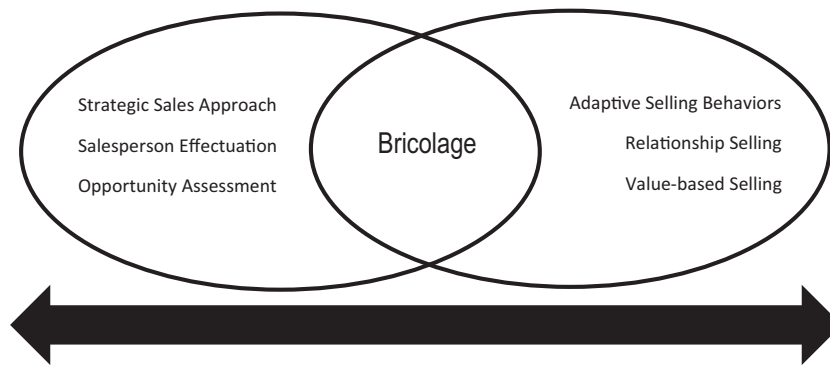


Fig. 1. A Framework of salesperson adaptations.

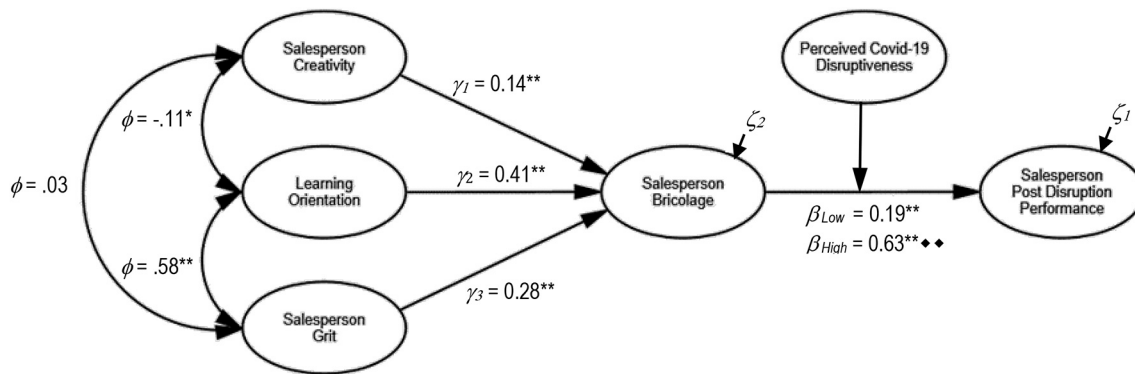


Fig. 2. A Model of salesperson bricolage.

dialogue about relevant business practices which are changing the way that sales is conceptualized, researched and practiced.

Salesperson bricolage in this study is supported by three important antecedent characteristics. Specifically, our study suggests that salesperson creativity aids the sales bricoleur. Creativity likely strengthens the sales bricoleur’s ability to uniquely combine and experiment with his or her available resources to develop opportunities. Additionally, we find that a learning orientation increases bricolage. Learning oriented salespeople have existing declarative and procedural knowledge to bring to bear on new situations (Sujan et al., 1994). Likewise, the more learning oriented the salesperson, the more likely he or she will be driven by challenges and seek solutions (Ahearne et al., 2010). As such, one’s learning orientation provides both important abilities as well as the motivation to enable bricolage. Lastly, we find that grit increases bricolage. Salesperson grit likely motivates bricolage as gritty salespeople are compelled to maintain their performance goals. During disruptions, this determination and perseverance will likely drive a salesperson to leverage existing resources for goal attainment.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

This paper makes several important theoretical contributions. First and foremost, it introduces the concept of bricolage into the sales domain. Our qualitative and quantitative investigation bolsters the idea that bricolage is a realistic portrayal of sales behaviors during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and the sales bricoleur represents an important addition to sales literature due to the probability of future sales disruptions. While this study provides a window into a unique time when salespeople were adapting to the rapidly altered selling environment caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the results indicate that salesperson bricolage improves performance in conditions of disruption and upheaval.

Salesperson bricolage adds to our theoretical understanding of the

adaptive capabilities of salespeople. By assessing and adapting to new resource constraints, this study demonstrates that sales bricoleurs often alter both the way that they interact with customers as well as their goal attainment strategies. In this way sales bricoleurs are realigning resources toward improving interactions with individual customers while also making adjustments to attain their sales goals. Thus, aspects of bricolage enable what Kwak et al. (2019, p. 44) describe as a “macro-adaptive strategy”. A macro-adaptive strategy is contingent upon adjusting to environmental factors rather than adapting to specific customers with influence tactics or strictly behavioral actions (Kwak et al., 2019). Thus, because, bricoleurs are salespeople capable of both customer- and macro-adaptive strategies, our study supports a broader perspective on adaptive selling that includes both customer and market-level adaptive strategies.

By evaluating a salesperson’s creativity, learning orientation, and grit, this study identifies three distinct salesperson characteristics that help support and enable the sales bricoleur. This study coheres with the larger body of salesperson creativity research in that it suggests that creativity can help to enhance sales performance. Evans et al. (2012) list salesperson creativity as an important research priority because of its explanatory potential. This study adds to the sales literature by suggesting that creativity is an antecedent of salesperson bricolage. Similarly, this study finds that sales bricoleurs benefit from a learning orientation. While a learning orientation has been examined as an antecedent to both behavioral (e.g., Sujan et al., 1994) and performance outcomes (e.g., Park & Holloway, 2003), we identify its importance to salesperson bricolage. Lastly, this study identifies grit as an antecedent of bricolage. The very concept of bricolage explicitly highlights that resource constraints are a necessary condition and resource constraints are a form of adversity to overcome. This research adds to the grit literature by examining the construct under a period of undeniable disruption and frustration, and showing that gritty salespeople are more apt to engage in bricolage. Recent sales research has shown some

downsides to grit (Friend, Johnson, & Ranjan, 2020; Lussier, Hartmann, & Bolander, 2019), but our research comports with the positive connotations and adds to the grit literature by examining the construct under a period of undeniable disruption and frustration, and showing that gritty salespeople are more apt to engage in bricolage.

This study supports and contributes to past research in the areas of strategic environmental management and critical sales events. Critical sales events (CSE) were originally defined by Russ and McNeilly (1994, p. 236) as “an event in the professional life of a sales rep that is out of the ordinary.” Influenced from the larger body of Critical Life Events (e.g., Inglehart, 1991; Turner & Wheaton, 1995), a core tenet of CSE literature is that events are powerful, formative, and important to various sales related outcomes. For example, CSE have helped explain changes in role ambiguity and stress (Russ, McNeilly, Comer, & Light, 1998), customer relationship development (Clark, Lachowetz, Irwin, & Schimmel, 2003), job satisfaction (Rutherford, Boles, & Ambrose, 2019), and intentions to quit (Chandrashekar, McNeilly, Russ, & Marinova, 2000). The key notion is that events can be powerfully influential and elicit changes in perspective, behaviors, and outcomes. The Covid-19 pandemic is both a CSE and an environmental shift that selling organizations must work to manage. Findings suggests that some CSE can be catalysts for success for those salespeople with the tacit knowledge to adapt. While much of the CSE literature seeks to identify and mitigate the impact of negative incidents, our study identifies bricolage as a sales capability that is particularly helpful when selling environments change. Likewise, by examining bricolage and its antecedents, this study contributes to work on strategic environmental management by identifying beneficial salesperson characteristics that can be selected for and cultivated to help react to environmental change.

Resource allocation has received limited attention the sales literature, but as Evans et al. (2012) highlight, the ways in which salespeople can effectively utilize and implement resources is an under-researched area. Mayo and Mallin (2010) identify “resource challenged” and “resource secure” salespeople; but focus on how salespeople make attributions in the face of different outcomes. Bonney, Plouffe and Wolter (2014) note that the overall environment plays a role in how salespeople allocate resources. Nguyen et al. (2018) identify different types of resources available to salespeople, and find that salespeople often become entrepreneurial and diligent in resource allocation. The concept of salesperson bricolage builds upon this prior research, and answers the Evans et al. (2012) call by looking at the ways in which salespeople marshal resources in the face of disruption.

Findings contribute to the growing body of research around entrepreneurial bricolage. Bricolage research mainly points out the positives outcomes of bricolage, but suggest that there can be drawbacks (Wu, Liu, & Zhang, 2017). These downsides include unpredictability (Ciborra, 1996), artificial hybridization (Lanzara, 1999), and organizational stifling (Perkmann & Spicer, 2014). Senyard et al. (2014) argued that resource constrained firms need to be selective in the application of bricolage behaviors if they would like to innovate successfully. This study, however, provides further evidence that bricolage can improve performance. Bricolage is geared toward experimenting with and exploiting what is at hand, rather than toward the exploration of new resources (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010, p. 141) this is why the sales bricoleur is able to do well under conditions of extreme disruption. A bricoleur is built for disruption and is able to leverage the resultant disarray in a manner that benefits both the salesperson and firm. As such bricolage can be increasingly important to salespeople in more entrepreneurial types of selling environments.

At its core, strategy implementation is a question of resource deployment and allocation. Thus, the study of bricolage complements the literature on emergent strategies. This literature identifies both deliberate and emergent strategies and suggests that they exist on a continuum where emergent strategies represent higher levels of flexibility, openness, responsiveness and a willingness to learn (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Hamel (2009) argues that emergent strategies help

market actors navigate a turbulent world, where prediction is difficult and long-range planning is of limited value. Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) have developed an emergent strategy model which argues that autonomous strategic behaviors, alongside resource allocation and iterative action can result in a distinct emergent strategy approach. Thus, bricolage is undoubtedly an emergent approach and by examining the sales bricoleur we are extending this theoretical basis into the sales realm.

Lastly, we find that the service ecosystems approach of Hartmann et al. (2018) to be an apt representation of the contemporary sales environment. An ecosystem contains multitudes of interacting participants; and the present study adds to this burgeoning concept by articulating the notion of the sales bricoleur. The sales bricoleur represents an important contribution to the service ecosystem because of their unique abilities and skill-set surrounding resource reallocation. We believe that the sales bricoleur represents an emergent approach to handling age-old issues in an ecosystem, that is, resource constraints and exogenous shocks.

6.2. Managerial implications

Findings from this study have several key implications for salespeople who are navigating rapidly changing selling environments. Our findings suggest that in challenging times, bricolage enhances salesperson performance. During these times of disruption, sales bricoleurs should embrace their determination, expertise, and creativity. They should have meaningful discussions with management about risk, take stock of current resources, and seek out new solutions to manage their business. While mistakes and set-backs are inevitable, performance will ultimately be higher when salespeople engage in bricolage.

For those managing salespeople, our findings suggest supporting and enabling more entrepreneurial approaches to selling may benefit the selling organization. Doing so may run contrary to recent trends aimed at keeping salespeople more narrowly focused on selling tasks and on the sales process. For instance, salesforce automation and sales enablement solutions often direct and restrict sales activities (Peterson, Malshe, Friend, & Dover, 2020; Rangarajan, Dugan, Rouziou, & Kunkle, 2020), thereby, limiting more strategic and entrepreneurial aspects of sales. The investments, implementation and success of these solutions suggest that, in typical situations, control may be preferred to experimentation. However, our findings point to bricoleurs being more successful during disruptions. As such, relaxing some of these controls may enhance sales force performance in more disruptive selling environments.

At its core, bricolage is a theory of action, and much of what we recommend involves sales managers and organizations taking steps which will both enable and bolster these specific behaviors. By identifying three important antecedents to bricolage, this study provides managerial guidance for enabling bricolage. Specifically, our findings imply that enabling salesperson creativity, learning orientation, and grit can facilitate bricolage. This leads to the following substantive and summarily difficult question. During a critical environmental disruption, how do sales managers foster creativity, learning, and grit among salespeople? We offer specific suggestions for managers below.

First, sales managers can function as creativity enablers and instruct their salespeople on ways to employ creativity. Gong, Huang, and Farh (2009) suggest strategies which will bolster observational and enactive abilities, which in turn will lead to self-efficacy and creativity. These activities could include creativity training, creativity exercises or any number of hands-on activities that will further enable creative capabilities. Miao and Wang (2016) highlight that creativity is often the result of domain-specific knowledge, and making sure that salespeople have up-to-date product and service knowledge is likely a way to boost creativity. Wang and Netemeyer (2004) recommend the sharing of creative ideas within a salesforce, both formally and informally. It is not difficult to imagine formal meetings containing a creative idea

component, and how this would further foster creativity within the salesforce and the broader organization.

Second, sales managers can support, develop, and reward a learning orientation within the sales force. Thus, we propose the implementation of learning goals in performance metrics. This implication is directly in line with the foundational work of [Sujan et al. \(1994\)](#), who suggest that learning goals will allow a salesperson to actively engage with the learning process, develop self-efficacy and thus, become more effective learners. [Kohli et al. \(1998\)](#) recommend that supervisory orientations match the needs and requirements of salespeople. In practice, this suggests that salesperson capabilities along with sales results should be the focal point of any sales force control system for managers concerned with further developing a learning oriented sales force.

Third, [Duckworth \(2016\)](#) contends that grit can be developed through meaningful goal setting and general adaptiveness. Thus, the development of grit will also require supportive management and opportunities to fail forward. [Jordan, Ferris, Hochwarter, and Wright \(2019\)](#) contends that grit is sharpened via purpose-driven goals and task strategies. Thus, we also suggest that managers develop individualized goal-setting plans with salespeople, and help salespeople internalize these goals and plan strategies for goal attainment.

An additional broad-based implication for sales managers and organizations is to create supportive and friendly environments where these antecedents can flourish. In reality, this means that sales managers and sales organizations need to honestly appraise themselves of the organizational climate. Managers need to do investigative work to find out if their environment is one in which creativity, learning and grit are mere buzzwords, or are actually capable of being practiced.

However, enabling salespeople to experiment, take risks, learn and persevere may only be part of a solution. Managers may also want to facilitate more rapid change management techniques, support information sharing among the sales team, and identify and monitor more creative and determined salespeople who demonstrate bricolage. Additionally, organizations would be well-advised to track and reward individuals and teams who are displaying bricoleur behaviors. In addition, screening, recruiting and hiring practices which center on salesperson creativity, learning orientation and grit are also methods for organizations to better leverage employees, potential or otherwise.

Because sales bricoleurs better utilize resources, selling organizations with effective organizational learning processes may be uniquely positioned to leverage new discoveries for competitive gains. To realize these opportunities, selling organizations should have policies and procedures in place to support, monitor, and replicate sales bricoleur best practices. Furthermore, organizations should acquire and develop sales talent to weather change and environmental disruptions. Thus, implications of this study support and inform hiring for diversity initiatives and suggest that sales bricoleurs can be a vital component of any sales force.

6.3. Limitations and future research

As with all empirical research, it is important to properly delimit the scope of this study. Although attempts were made to ensure a high-quality sample, our study is based on proprietary third-party panel data that may limit the generalizability of findings. Additionally, we examine these causal relationships with cross-sectional data. For these reasons, we advocate for additional research examining bricolage that can substantiate our findings with longitudinal and experimental inquiry.

The model and hypotheses developed in this study were tested with data collected from a single source. Future inquiry collecting dyadic data would be of interest as buyers and sales managers may have different and potentially more accurate views of salesperson characteristics and environmental adaptations. Likewise, while objective self-report performance data has been shown to be valid and free of bias ([Churchill Jr. et al., 1985](#)), buyer input or organizational data may improve the face

validity of measures. Furthermore, our model examined bricolage without the inclusion of conceptually similar concepts that may represent potential mediators. Thus, we advocate for future research to include salesperson effectuation, adaptive selling, goal attainment strategies, and others to reduce endogeneity concerns.

In addition, for managers looking to enable bricoleurs, our qualitative interviews help illuminate future research questions. For the practitioners we interviewed, enabling bricolage during the Covid-19 pandemic involved (1) providing valuable resources, (2) providing guidance and training on how to use resources, and (3) a creating a supportive and encouraging environment. Resources identified as high-value often involved information and technologies. The quotes below illustrate how management enabled bricolage by providing resources.

Wholesaler 2: Early on, we made the decision to do whatever we could to supply our key customers; even at a loss. I count on our manager to keep products in inventory and keep me in the loop on deliveries. I don't care if they came from Home depot or how much they cost us. I just need availability to fulfill customer demand.

Business service 1: My home office used to be my laptop. Now it is pretty sweet.

As such, future research should investigate how managers can provide unique sets of resources which will enable entrepreneurial forms of sales behavior. In addition, effective resource deployment is also a promising stream of research for individual salespeople. Most importantly, what are the most useful types of resources to recombine? Additional research could examine how salespeople respond to managerial recombination of resources, and the appropriate level of salesperson involvement in these decisions. Salespeople and sales managers might also conceptualize resources differently, and research which delves into these differences would be impactful.

Valued resources also included new capabilities and skills. Thus, assistance and training pertaining to the use of new resources ways of doing things was valued by bricoleurs. Qualitative interviews identified several examples where training support enabled bricolage; illustrated by the example below.

Business service 4: I think training is really important right now. Training on how to set up a home office, how to structure your day, how to use technology, how to structure a virtual sales call. I think you're seeing a lot of people get down right now because there's not that traditional sales floor trash talking, ripping people up, celebrating wins, hitting the gong, that kind of stuff's gone. So we kind of need training on how to set yourself up for a successful day every day.

Bricoleurs valued managers maintaining a high-level of communication that facilitated a trusting and supportive work environment. Communication that was transparent, compassionate and empathetic all attributed to bricolage.

Manufacturer 2: Corporate did many interviews with our CEO, making sure that we had little videos that went out to everyone, just thank you for your support. Hang in there, be positive.

Wholesaler 4: My director and myself, we had a weekly kickoff with the sales team every Monday. It was virtual, where we kind of gave updates of what's going on in the world. What's going on with our numbers, what's going on with COVID, what do we know? We just wanted to be as transparent as possible because none of us knew what was happening. So more information is better than none.

Business service 1: In this work at home kind of world, encouraging people to do things that they otherwise couldn't have done when they were going to an office every day. Our sales director gave me this really good quote. It was like, "The old workplace, you used to have to structure your life around your job. And now you get to structure your job around your life." And if you can push people to

think that way, I think that it will empower them to do some passion projects that might put them in a better sphere to make that next call.

Together, these insights suggest that future research should investigate further the specific ways in which managerial resourcefulness, helpfulness, kindness, and candor can enable the bricoleur during a time of disruption. As a corollary, future sales bricolage research could also delve into issues pertaining to the transfer of training.

Our dependent variable captured salesperson perceptions of their performance relative to peers. This general assessment enables comparison of performance despite any change in expectations; it does not provide details pertaining to how individual salespeople were assessed or how these assessments changed during the pandemic. Our qualitative interviews identified several instances where more behavioral controls were relaxed and salespeople were encouraged to make quality calls over quantity. Similarly, we found instances where salespeople were directed to shore up relationships in lieu of approaching new prospects. Future research would benefit by the exploring relationships among bricolage, behavior change, and control systems.

We examined bricolage during a time of disruption. Bricolage is expected to be particularly helpful under these conditions. Our understanding of how bricolage relates to sales performance during less dynamic times is an important future research question. Likewise, further inquiry into situational and organizational conditions under which bricolage may hinder performance or lead to undesired outcomes is warranted. The future research possibilities for sales bricolage are exciting. Most of life occurs under resource constraints of various types and we hope that this initial investigation motivates further research into the concept.

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