



Salesperson's *Karma Orientation*: A Conceptual Framework and Research Propositions

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Abstract

Purpose: In this conceptual article based on the Indian philosophy of karma that all individual actions have the power to bring joy or sorrow based on the nature of action, we propose a new construct, salesperson's karma orientation, and discuss its key antecedents and consequences.

Design/methodology/approach: We review literature on the central philosophy of karma yoga, and on self-leadership, and self-control to propose this new construct, its antecedents, and consequences in a sales context.

Findings: We put forward four dimensions of karma orientation of salespersons: work as selfless action, work as duty towards others, detachment from work-related rewards, and equanimity under environmental influences. Salesperson's karma orientation is essential for developing relationship with customers, enhances selling effectiveness, ethical behaviors, and spiritual well-being, by providing the salespersons with a sense of duty and ownership towards their work.

Practical implications: The concept of karma orientation would be useful for stressful jobs such as sales, and managers and researchers would find it useful as a coping strategy as well as for improving performance of employees.

Originality: For the first time, we propose a new construct of karma orientation at an individual level in a sales setting. We also propose the key antecedents and key consequences of karma orientation.

Key words: karma, karma orientation, salespersons, ethical climate, spirituality.

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"Karmaṇa Ma Mada"

gn -- (Chapter 2:47) Bhagwat Gita.

[You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to doing your duty.]

INTRODUCTION

The Sanskrit word *karma* derives its meaning from its root *kr*, which means doing or an activity, which encompasses an individual's mental and physical activities, as well as his/her, speech. In Buddhism, karma is defined as action and effects of action and is defined as "Overall psychological impulse behind an action, that sets going a chain of causes culminating in a karmic fruit," (Havassy 2000, p 17). In certain oriental cultures such as that in India, the concept of *karma* (or work) is strongly related to future happiness or sorrow, and the societies in these cultures, "inculcate in their members the importance of work relative to other life goals" (Sinha, 2000; p 19). These cultures socialize its members to consider themselves to be born with duties rather than with rights (Sinha, 1997).

As described in the oriental philosophy, *karma* is the only right that individuals possess and the only process that they can influence at individual level is to ensure that acts lead

to meaningful effects. Based on this common understanding of karma, we propose in this article, a new construct, *KaOb*

motivation to perform the necessary tasks (Manz, 1986; Manz and Neck, 2004). Similar to our conceptualization of karma orientation, self-leadership also emphasizes on natural rewards that are inherent the task or activity itself (Manz, 1986), based on intrinsic motivation and feelings of competence and self-control.

We show in this article in sales context, that karma orientation of salespeople influences their ability and willingness to perform sales-related tasks. Such clarity on self-awareness is essential in relationship development with customers (Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram, 2008), and enhances their role effectiveness, ethical behaviors, and spiritual well-being, providing the salespersons with a sense of duty towards their work. The sales profession is characterized by stressful customer engagements and chasing monthly sales quotas, where in the long term, in order to perform, salespeople often engage in different coping behaviors to deal with burnout and stress. In such a scenario, salespeople are likely to develop spiritual thoughts that allow them to view their work with a sense of duty, chase their sales quotas as a realistic estimate, and appreciate the effects of individual actions on their team's performance. This spiritual belief is likely to bring in more joy, commitment, satisfaction in a sales job (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). This belief is fundamental to the Indian philosophy of life, which suggests that all individual actions have the power to bring joy if the aim is good, or sorrow otherwise (Dasgupta, 1991 as cited in Mulla and Krishna, 2006), and is known as an individual's karma.

The rest of the paper is structured like this: we first provide a theoretical background to the concept of karma, and karma yoga. Following that, we provide the conceptualization of karma orientation and discuss its four dimensions, an orientation of salespersons based on the concept of karma. The following sections are on conceptual framework of karma orientation, based on the key antecedents and consequences of karma orientation. We provide managerial implications of the salesperson's karma orientation and its outcomes, and conclude with directions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Karma yoga or total dedication to work has been described to have beneficial influence on organizational effectiveness (Menon

Karma Orientation-Conceptualization and Dimensions

Based on the above theoretical developments, this new construct, we define the karma orientation of salespersons as the *ahimsa*

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We propose four dimensions of karma orientation of salespersons, as discussed below.

1. Work as selfless action.
2. Work as duty towards others (e.g. customers, employees, and others).
3. Detachment from work-related rewards (e.g. performance benefits and bonuses).
4. Equanimity under environmental influences.

We now describe these dimensions in greater detail.

1. Work as selfless action

A salesperson's selfless actions constitute all his/her activities that may have an impact on his/her customers, supervisor, organization, and the society general. If salespersons do activities that are helpful to them but not their customers and/or supervisors,

¹ Dimensions 2 and 3 have been also suggested in Mulla and Krishnan (2006) and dimensions 2, 3, and 4 also described in Mulla and Krishnan (2007). However, these studies are not in salesperson's context.

organizations, and society, then it is likely to be detrimental to someone, and does not constitute the karma of the salesperson. Example, if a salesperson makes false promises to his/her customers to bag an order, it is likely that he/she is acting with a selfish motive, which is sooner or later going to be detrimental. Activities that are carried out with a larger interest in mind, such as selling those products that benefits both customers, and the salesperson's organization, are more aligned to a salesperson's karma being more selfless in nature than selling a product that earns him/her a higher commission.

2. Work as duty towards others

Individual karma is interconnected with the group's and even nation's karma (Blavatsky, 1981). In addition to the sense of obligation

not cheat the customers by quoting a higher price or by forcing them to buy a product which they don't need.

Esoteric philosophy suggests that individuals are responsible for their actions as they are capable of making choices and are able to handle personal karma (Nicholson, 1985). This makes individuals responsible for all their actions and circumstances, opportunities and limitations throughout their lives. Bhagwat Gita (Chapter 2:47) states that the only way one can discharge this responsibility or personal karma is through a sense of obligation or duty towards others. Therefore, we propose a sense of obligation or duty towards others as an important dimension of karma orientation at an individual salesperson level.

3. Detachment from work-related rewards

The awareness that karma gives back the consequences of action is extremely important, given the fact that an individual's thoughts, motives and emotions result in causes that determines the current state of affairs at individual level. Therefore, Karma works to promote individual's growth in life by influencing the learnings from life. Individual's ability to receive and interpret feedback influences his ability to make corrections and identify improvement areas (Nicholson, 1985). Karma therefore empowers individuals with immense learning ability with the ongoing cycle of action and its effects. On the contrary, if salespersons are motivated by external rewards such performance bonuses, it is likely that they become more performance-oriented than learning-oriented, resulting in stunting their personal and professional growth in life.

This complex chain of cause and effects ~~is~~ ~~is~~ the outcomes of individual's action which is the only factor that can be influenced at individual level. Karma adjusts each effect to a cause and allows individuals to be aware of ~~of~~ ~~of~~ their action and effects. This awareness facilitates learning from life in te

leading to desires, or by being neutral to experiences of happiness or pain. Further, Gita explains that when individuals perform actions with complete control of mind, they need not experience pain or happiness because the state of mind, in absence of desires for results, becomes equal towards happiness or pain (Tilak, 1915/2000 as cited in Mulla and Krishnan, 2007).

To attain equanimity under environmental influences, salespersons should perform actions with a controlled state of mind, a sense of duty, and for the benefit for others. If the individual's belief is that s/he is an eternal soul, his/her karma is the duty that is required to be performed, then environmental influences are likely to become insignificant, and a sense of equanimity gets developed. We therefore propose equanimity towards environmental influences as fourth dimension of salesperson's karma orientation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We now present our conceptual framework. We propose that a salesperson's karma orientation has four key antecedents and five key individual level consequences. We discuss each of these variables in more detail.

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Ethical Climate

Parboteeah and Cullen suggest that ethical climate motivates employees to identify ethical issues within the organization, and prompts them to diagnose and assess situations (2003, p. 138). Badrinarayanan and Madhava (2008) suggest that organizations that are high on ethical climate are likely to be high on benevolence and principles and their employees are more likely to develop spirituality. Since spirituality and ethical climate are closely associated, it is likely that higher ethical climate in organizations would be a harbinger of a climate where employees find more meaning in their work, are more interconnected, and individual-level spirituality promotes them to find more meaning in their work (Duchovaram) Plowg in]TJ.

vision of calling and membership (Fry, 2003). Silberth and Benson (2004) suggested that supervisory behavior is not only positively related to employee's well being, but also makes incremental contribution to the employee's psychological well being that includes spiritual well-being.

Dent, Higgin and Wharff's (2005) analysis of 87 scholarly studies suggested that leaders who motivate their employees by providing sense of meaning for their work, and not by rewards alone, are better able to lead people.

individual's feelings towards his/her life values that are accepted by the majority of population comprise the macro culture whereas values of a group or a segment of population or a social class, comprise the micro culture. This makes the concept of personal values dependent on the culture (E

Organizational Values

Organizational values and business ethics has expanded its scope to include spiritual values and this change is led by two distinct forces; (i) with changing business metrics, the employees are expected to protect organizational interest at any cost and (ii) for many employees work life has become very dominant in their life spaces (Kolodensky, Giacalone and Jurkeiwicz, 2007). This phenomenon has created a very strong and urgent need for connectedness, meaning and purpose in today's workplace. Milliman (2003) posited that workplace values including spiritual values influence the individual level work attitudes and job performance.

Jurkeiwicz and Giacalone (2004) suggested that organizations must recognize the individual dignity at workplace and facilitate personal growth for better performance. Such organizations will be more likely to address the employees need for connectedness, meaning and purpose at work. Specifically, in sales organizations, organizational values permeates to the sales force culture and a strong one reinforces shared beliefs, shared values and goals among salespeople. Therefore, organizational values will have positive influence on salesperson's job attitudes, performance and need for connectedness with

Salesperson's Effectiveness

Anderson and Oliver (1987) suggest that under behavior-b

Spiritual Well-being

Spirituality has been defined as “expressing our desire to find meaning and purpose in our lives” (Neck and Milliman, 1994; p. 9). Woff and Denton (1999) propose that an important element of spirituality is interconnectedness, and Porter, Kraft, and Claycomb note, “The healthy spirituality of employees also increases the closeness of their social relationships and a sense of emotional connectedness” (2003, p. 197). Since karma yoga that forms the basis of karma orientation is one of the four paths to attain an ideal way of life comparable to meditation, devotion and knowledge (Mulla and Krishnan, 2006),

Ethical Behaviors

As per Ferrell and Gresham's (1985) contingency model of marketing ethics, a salespersons' willingness to behave unethically is contingent upon their values, opportunities, organizational factors and members of their social group. Hence a karmically oriented salesperson would be less inclined towards unethical behaviors because s/he would be more strongly anchored in values such as work as duty, concern for others in society, selfless action, and detachment from outcomes of his/her efforts. According to Hunt and Vitell's (1986) general theory of marketing ethics, the salesperson first perceives the ethical problem, then alternative solutions and finally the consequences of his/her behaviors under influence of environmental factors. Therefore, as per this model, a salesperson high on karma orientation would be more equanimous and less likely to get influenced by environmental factors, making him/her more ethical in his/her behaviors.

Jones and Kavanaugh (1996) have contended that ethical intentions of employees will be lower when the perceived quality of the work experience is low. Since karmic orientation in salespersons leads them to perceive higher meaning in their work that positively affects their perceptions towards their organization, higher the karma orientation of salespeople, higher would be their ethical behaviors. Moreover, salespeople who are highly karmic oriented are less likely to fall for external rewards, and therefore less prone to biting the wrong bait. Salespeople are in boundary spanning roles which means they are often in situations when job requirements may cause conflicts (Jaramillo et al. 2006),

and such conflicts may lead to possible ethical issues for the salespersons. However, karmic salespersons without any expectancy of rewards, are less likely to face role conflict since they have less selfish motives and show higher concern for others while serving them. Therefore with low expectancy of rewards in return for efforts, such salespersons are less likely to show unethical behaviors. Therefore we posit that ethical behaviors are more likely to be shown by salespersons with high karma orientation.

Proposition 7

his/her organizational commitment, specifically normative aspect of the organizational commitment of salespeople.

Proposition 8

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Job Satisfaction

Social relationships reduce perceptions of environment as stressful (Deeter-Schmelz, and Ramsey, 1997), and since a salesperson with a karma orientation is likely to be more interconnected with others, s/he is likely to build more meaningful social relationships that increase his/her job satisfaction and reduce job related stress. A salesperson who finds his/her job more meaningful and views his/her work as duty is more likely to be satisfied with what s/he is doing in his/her job. Moreover, a highly karmic oriented salesperson is also likely to be more equable under environmental influences and is less likely to experience job related stress. Meaning in job and a sense of duty is likely to engender positive affect towards the work and work situation. Such positive affect towards work enhances job satisfaction of salespersons (Smith, Kendall, and Hulin, 1969). A salesperson high on karma orientation would face lower role stress, such as lower role conflict and lower role conflict. Lower role stress leads to higher job satisfaction, as established in the sales literature (e.g. Fry et al., 1986; Rizzo, House, and

Lirtzman, 1970). Therefore we posit that a ~~customer~~ customer-oriented salesperson is likely to experience higher job satisfaction.

Proposition 9

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MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The concept of management has long been ~~traced~~ traced as characterized by high control, competitiveness, unemotional, with ~~an~~ emphasis on winning and managerial effectiveness in terms of ~~financial~~ financial gains rather than ~~employee~~ employee satisfaction (e.g. Baker, 1991; Smith and Smits, 1994). Sales as ~~a~~ a profession too, is undergoing a change and salespeople are more inclined to ~~explore~~ explore beyond the competitiveness and drive to achieve sales goals. This shift is ~~towards~~ towards a search for meaning in life through self and inner peace (Cohen, 1997).

In context of sales force effectiveness, ~~one~~ the key drivers are those factors that shapes salespeople's skills, capabilities, and ~~values~~ values they hold towards ~~performance~~ performance and goals achievements (Zoltners, Sinha and ~~Bar~~ Bar, 2008). Along with the challenges to maximize sales force effectiveness, sales ~~managers~~ managers face another ~~set~~ set of complex tasks of managing workplace stress and anxiety, ~~provide~~ provide performance rewards, and maintaining a work-life balance. With these issues ~~at~~ the background of sales management, and a growing interest among salespeople to ~~seek~~ seek spiritual path to deal with work related issues, our study offers several implications for practitioners.

The spiritual needs of salespeople, such as search for a meaning in their work, needs to be addressed by the sales managers by offering broader definitions of the goals that their sales team strives for. By promoting spiritual interpretations of business situations and supporting karma orientation of salespeople, sales managers can make significant improvement in the psychological well-being of their people. As such individuals with high levels of karma orientation are likely to be high on customer empathy, emotional intelligence, and sense of duty towards others. Therefore, a team of salespeople with karmic orientation will be delivering better goals achievements as their efforts and work strategies will be driven by a sense of calling, and duty. In such a scenario, sales managers need to balance their short-term and long-term objectives as the team members function with equanimity towards environmental situations.

Further, sales managers need to adopt and promote humanistic values at firm level to establish practices that are ethical and to recognize the self-worth of individuals and help the salespeople in achieving his personal growth as well as organizational goals (Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram, 2008). An organization that promotes karma in their salespeople not only gives them the freedom to grow spiritually and mentally- but also respects their individuality, reduces unhealthy competition among them, create more bonding among themselves, and bring more harmony within and between them.

In this conceptual article, we have made an attempt to present a fresh perspective of a salesperson's work, by suggesting a new orientation of salespersons, karma orientation to draw the attention of the sales researchers towards providing more meaning in a

salesperson's work and life. The proposed conceptual framework and research propositions are a preliminary effort, and encourage further exploration of this model within sales context. Propositions presented in this paper need empirical validation and therefore, developing scales to measure the constructs is an important research imperative.

Further, salesperson's stress coping strategies, quality of life, can be studied in context of his/her karma orientation. Future research may explore karma orientation specifically for salespeople who work outside the organization, and are less likely to be influenced by the workplace practices.

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