

# AMBIDEXTROUS SELLING BY FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES: A REVIEW-BASED STUDY<sup>#</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Ambidextrous selling among the frontline employees (FLEs) is the outcome of the coherence between the traditionally considered conflicting tasks of selling service, retention of old customer while acquiring new ones and selling of new and existing products. Instigated by Duncan (1976), 'ambidexterity' denotes the simultaneous pursuit of conflicting the organisational demands of alignment and adaptability, which were then considered better to be achieved separately by creating dual structures within an organisation. Later, March (1991) defined ambidexterity on the basis of *exploitation* and *exploration*; the essence of exploitation is the refinement and extension of the existing competencies, which is the creation of efficiency and reliability with positive, predictable and proximate results. The kernel for exploration is experimentation with new alternatives for creating flexibility and creativity with distant and uncertain and often negative results. The traditional view conceives

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<sup>#</sup>This is a revised title of the paper that was earlier presented at ANVESH-2019, the doctoral conference at Nirma University

exploration and exploitation as two exclusive and competitive activities which are best to be balanced rather than performed simultaneously due to scarce resources (March, 1991). Various theoretical perspectives had been proposed to elaborate as how ambidextrous organisations manage the trade-off between conflicting tasks: initially ambidexterity was managed by creating specialised business units within an organisation to manage the alignment-adaptability-related tasks. The scholars termed it as *structural ambidexterity* (Duncan, 1976; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). *Contextual ambidexterity* is the creation of systems or procedures across entire organisation, which assists individual employees in taking decisions of their own to decide how to divide their time and resources in conflicting demands of alignment-adaptability (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). With *sequential ambidexterity*, the firms manage ambidexterity by cyclical process to achieve ambidexterity over time, rather than concurrently. *Realised ambidexterity* advances ambidexterity in terms of what a firm attains through exploitation and exploration-related activities (Simsek, 2009).

Impressions of ambidexterity at the individual level were initially presented by Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004, p. 211) in their proposition 'although ambidexterity is a characteristic of a business unit as a whole, it manifests itself in the specific actions of individuals throughout the organization'. Raisch, Birkinshaw, Probst, and Tushman (2009) noted that a firm's ambidexterity is rooted in the employee's ability to manage disparate task demands and integrate them for cross-fertilisation, making it clear that organisational ambidexterity cannot be fully comprehended until understanding it at the individual employee level. The present-day academicians are focused to apprehend the ambidextrous behaviour of frontline sales employees because of the fact that being ambidextrous, salespersons can add more revenues streams to the organisation and enhance the satisfaction of the customer without incurring any additional cost (Borgh, Jong, & Nijssen, 2015; Jasmand, Blazevic, & de Ruyter, 2012).

Despite its vital importance in the organisation, the understanding of the subject is still in the dawning phase as there are a handful of studies apprehending ambidexterity among salespersons. Considering the importance of a clear understanding of the various dimensions of ambidexterity, this article is aimed to provide a brief summary of the studies assessing the ambidextrous behaviour of FLEs in selling goods or services and present direction for future researches. This article is divided into three sections; initially, a brief idea about the ambidexterity of FLEs and its antecedents are being provided, and thereafter the summary of the studies exhibiting ambidexterity is presented followed by the suggestions for future researches.

## **AMBIDEXTERITY AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

Extant literature defines ambidexterity as an employee's ability to achieve or accomplish seemingly conflict tasks. Jasmand et al. (2012) state ambidexterity as the ability of FLEs to engage simultaneously in behaviours that might otherwise be viewed as being in conflict with one another. Ambidexterity has been viewed as an orientation that motivates a set of customer service behaviours and a set of cross/up-selling behaviours. Extant ambidexterity literature exhibits different levels of organisational structures where ambidexterity is observed and studied: organisation level (Sarkees, Hullah, & Prescott, 2010), managerial level (Van Der Borgh & Schepers, 2014) and individual employee level (Yu, & Kimpakorn, 2014; Yu, Patterson, & de Ruyter, 2013). Different dimensions of ambidexterity are as follows: 'exploitation-exploration' (Kauppila & Tempelaar, 2016), 'efficiency-flexibility' (Yu, Gudergan, & Chen, 2018), 'sales-service' (Yu et al., 2013), 'hunting-farming' (DeCarlo & Lam, 2016; Nijssen, Guenzi, & van der Borgh, 2017), 'sale of new and existing products' (van der Borgh, de Jong, & Nijssen, 2017) and 'service-cross/up-selling' (Jasmand et al., 2012), across various industries such as pharmaceuticals (Sok, Sok, & De Luca, 2016), ICT (van der Borgh et al., 2017), service (Yu et al., 2018), retail (Van Der Borgh & Schepers, 2014) and hospitality (Rapp et al., 2017).

## **ANTECEDENTS OF AMBIDEXTROUS BEHAVIOUR OF SALES EMPLOYEES**

The existing ambidexterity literature manifests two set of antecedents of ambidexterity among frontline sales employees. The first set includes the internal state of desire of an employee to be ambidextrous and the second set is clubbed with the organisational factors that lead an individual employee towards ambidexterity. Under internal factors, *intrinsic motivation* is of paramount importance in driving an individual employee towards ambidexterity because an intrinsically motivated employee is more probable and suitable to handle dual goals and achieve positive service related outcomes (Kao & Chen, 2016). Apart from that, the employee's *self-efficacy* – belief in the innate ability to achieve goals – increases the ability of an employee to be flexible and persistent and stimulates the sales attempts while service delivery (Patterson, Yu, & Kimpakorn, 2014; Yu, Patterson, & de Ruyter, 2015). 'Reason to' motivations, that is, *enjoyment to work*, *driven to work*, also emerged out as the drivers of ambidexterity. *Enjoyment to work* is the internal desire of the employee to pursue the tasks they find interesting or enjoyable. It enhances the positive emotions and favourable attitude towards job which lead to creative thinking and spontaneous engagement in service-sales jobs. *Driven to work* is the feeling to work to avoid guilt or to feel proud in case they perform well. Employees with this orientation feel inner pressure to work that may be detrimental in long run (Sok et al., 2016).

*Locomotion orientation* found by Jasmand et al. (2012) is one of most considered factors leading to the ambidextrous behaviour. It depicts the tendency of individuals to be in motion with respect to completion of tasks. Locomotion-oriented employees get started with a task and quickly move towards the next one without even evaluating whether they are moving in the right direction. *Learning orientation*, which exhibits the continuous desire of an individual to improve by acquiring new skills and mastering situations to augment one's competence, also drives ambidexterity among employees. These employees like to take challenges and are not worried about failure and mistakes, rather they treat them as feedback and learn from them (Yu et al., 2015). *Organisation identification* refers to how much an employee is congruent with the goals, norms and values of the organisation, and also steer ambidexterity in employees. Employees with high organisation identification and working in ambidextrous organisations are internally motivated and willing to engage themselves in multiple tasks (van der Borgh et al., 2017).

**Table 1: Antecedents and Outcomes of Ambidextrous Behaviour**

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Dimension of Ambidexterity</b>	<b>Antecedents of Ambidexterity</b>	<b>Outcome of the Study</b>
Jasmand et al. (2012)	Service–sales ambidexterity	Locomotion orientation	Increase in customer satisfaction and sales performance, but loss in efficiency
Yu et al. (2013)	Service–sales ambidexterity	Empowerment, team support and transformational leadership	Service–sales ambidexterity enhances financial performance
Patterson et al. (2014)	Service–sales ambidexterity	Self-efficacy, service–sale climate and LMX	Increase in frontline employee's service–sales performance
Yu et al. (2015)	Service–sales ambidexterity	Employee learning orientation	Service–sales ambidexterity is positively related to branch performance in terms of customer satisfaction and financial performance
Sok et al. (2016)	Service–sales ambidexterity	'Reason to' motivation – driven to work and enjoyment to work	Both driven to work and enjoyment to work enhance ambidexterity
van der Borgh et al. (2017)	Ambidextrous selling of new and existing products	Organisational identification and sales manager product selling ambidexterity	Positive effect on both organisational identification and sales manager product selling ambidexterity on the proactive selling of new and existing products
Nijssen et al. (2017)	Hunting and farming of customers	Incentive management and cross functional cooperation	Ambidextrous organisation (simultaneous hunting and farming) outperforms the organisation with single orientation

*LMX: leader–member exchange*

The organisational factors that infuse ambidexterity among individual employees are based on the theme proposed by Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) as contextual ambidexterity. It is the creation of systems and procedures within an organisation assisting and encouraging independent decision-making among individual employees. Yu et al. (2013) observed empowerment – belief to have more authority and responsibility, team support – belief that the team values their contribution and cares for their well-being and transformational leadership – when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees and stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group, as three organisational level antecedents to the ambidextrous behaviour of employees. Perceived organisational climate and the leader–member exchange (LMX), that is, the quality of relationship between employee and immediate supervisor also sparks a sense of ambidexterity among individual employees (Patterson et al., 2014). Psychological or perceived organisational climate is the perception of behaviours that are supported and rewarded in the organisation. In case if an organisation supports service–sales behaviours, then employees will adopt the same. Employees with good relationship, trust and mutual understanding with the immediate supervisor receive encouragement and recognition for the work which helps them in taking creative actions without any fear or threat.

Nijssen et al. (2017) propose sales incentive management and cross-functional cooperation as two organisational level antecedents of the ambidextrous behaviour of sales employees. Sales incentive management schemes identify a match between organisational goals, compensation plans and employee motivation facilitating employees to pursue dual goals in anticipation of more revenues. Cross-functional cooperation attenuates the conflict among various departments and enhances the quality, speed and accuracy of information shared, thus aiding sales employees to be ambidextrous by easily switching between activities. Sales manager ambidextrous selling orientation is also found to drive ambidextrous selling among sales employees as ambidextrous managers encourage and advance their sales staff to pursue multiple tasks. Moreover, the salesperson perceives the importance placed by sales manager in dual-goal attainment and channelise his or her objectives accordingly (van der Borgh et al., 2017).

## **SUMMARY OF THE STUDIES**

This section is divided into three segments on the basis of the studies assessing the ambidextrous behaviour of the FLEs in service–sales, selling new and existing products, and retention and acquisition of customers. The summary includes the objectives, the industry under which the study is conducted, sample size and the key findings of the study.

## **Service–Sales Ambidexterity**

Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones (2007) gathered data from 358 physicians through a questionnaire in the United States to examine the effect of salesperson (pharmaceutical sales representatives) service behaviour on their satisfaction and trust. The results indicate that salesperson service behaviour such as diligence, information communication and inducement plays a key role in building satisfaction among customers. While empathy and sportsmanship aids in building trust which, in turn, increases the customer share of the market.

In their pioneering work on service-cross/up-selling, Jasmand et al. (2012) advance ambidexterity at the individual level through an online survey conducted on 119 customer service representatives at a call center. The results indicate that locomotion orientation is positively related to ambidextrous behavior, and this relationship becomes stronger when locomotion orientation interacts with high assessment orientation. Moreover, strong team identification and high bounded discretion mitigate the interactive effect of locomotion and assessment orientation on the ambidextrous behaviour. Service–sale ambidexterity is not only positively related to customer satisfaction and sales performance but also resulted in the loss of efficiency.

Yu et al. (2013) examined 2306 FLEs in 267 bank branches of a retail bank to study the impact of contextual variables such as empowerment, team support and transformational leadership on service–sales ambidexterity at both individual and branch levels. At individual level, all the three variables; empowerment, team support and transformational leadership, are positively related to service–sales ambidexterity. Whereas at branch level, only empowerment and transformational leadership show a positive relationship with service–sales ambidexterity. Their results also show a positive relationship between service–sales ambidexterity and branch financial performance.

Patterson et al. (2014) conducted a cross-sectional survey in Thailand among 212 FLEs in various service industries. The results assert the importance of the three constructs, namely, individual differences (self-efficacy), organisational context (service–sale climate) and interpersonal elements (LMX theory), in achieving service–sales performance. Self-efficacy emerged as the strongest driver of successful ambidextrous performance. Moreover, LMX has a greater impact on service–sales performance under low environmental dynamism and high focal job experience. Self-efficacy has a stronger impact on service–sales performance under low focal job experience.

In their another study regarding service–sale ambidexterity of FLEs in the banking sector, Yu et al. (2015) examined 2306 from 267 bank branch to determine how FLE’s (a) ‘motivations’ of learning orientation, performance-proven orientation, performance-avoid orientation, (b) ‘ability’, that is, self-efficacy and (c) proxy efficacy, that is, confidence in operational manager affects ambidexterity both at individual and work unit levels. The findings propose that learning orientation and self-efficacy are positively related to service–sales ambidexterity. Confidence in the operational manager strengthens the relationship between learning orientation and service–sales ambidexterity but weakens the impact of self-efficacy on service–sales ambidexterity. The results also indicate a positive relationship between service–sales ambidexterity and branch performance.

Sok et al. (2016) examined the simultaneous role of ‘can do’ motivations and ‘reason to’ motivations in defining the mechanism for service–sale ambidexterity. Data were collected from 239 salespersons operating in different B2B pharmaceutical companies. The outcome of the study is in line with that of the study by Jasmand et al. (2012), regarding the positive relationship between locomotion orientation and service–sales ambidexterity, which is positively moderated by high assessment orientation. In addition, both the direct and interactive effects of ‘reason to’ motivations also depict a positive and significant relationship with service–sales ambidexterity. Furthermore, locomotion orientation interacts positively with ‘reason to’ motivations to facilitate service–sales ambidexterity.

Agnihotri, Gabler, Itani, Jaramillo, and Krush (2017) surveyed 219 salespersons and 162 customers across a wide range of B2B companies and industries to investigate the effect of sales–service ambidexterity on salespersons’ role conflict, adaptive behaviour and its impact on customer satisfaction. Their model indicates both positive and negative aspects of the dual-goal pursuit, and service–sales ambidexterity is positively related to adaptive selling behaviour that increases customer satisfaction. On the other hand, it also increases the role conflict among salespersons which shows a negative relationship with customer satisfaction. Customer demandingness augments both adaptive selling behaviour and role conflict among salespersons.

A research by Gabler, Ogilvie, Rapp, and Bachrach (2017) explores how different combinations of customer and selling orientations and their interaction impact FLEs’ pursuit of service and sales-related performance outcomes. Data were collected from a sample of 297 entry-level FLEs of a US firm operating in hospitality industry. The findings assert that employees’ commitment to service quality increases with an increase in customer orientation. Sales performance increases as employees become more sales-oriented. Creativity among employees increases when both customer and selling orientations are high.

Ogilvie, Rapp, Bachrach, Mullins, and Harvey (2017) studied the impact of sales and service climate on the salesperson performance. The sample of 252 salesperson and 68 managers of a firm operating in hospitality industry was taken for the study. Their results call attention towards the fact that with increasing sales climate, the relationship between service climate and customer satisfaction becomes stronger. For helping behaviour, the case is just opposite as with increasing sales climate the relationship between service climate and helping behaviour tends to be weaker. On the other hand, with increasing service climate, the relationship between sales climate and sales efforts becomes weak. Similar results were found in relation to the impact sales climate on sales performance that higher level of service climate weakens the relationship between sales climate and sales performance.

In a study on 163 FLEs of a bank, Faia and Vieira (2017) explored the effect of the control system on the ambidextrous behaviour of the employees. The results regarding the effects' regularity focus on the ambidextrous behaviour are in line with Jasmand et al. (2012) that locomotion orientation is positively related to the ambidextrous behaviour, and this relationship is amplified with higher levels of assessment orientation. In addition, this relationship becomes stronger under behaviour-based control system. Impressions were also found for the positive relationship between the outcome-based control system and the ambidextrous behaviour, which is positively related to both sales performance and customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is higher with ambidextrous employees under outcome-based control system. Furthermore, the conditional indirect effect of the control system is stronger on sales performance and customer satisfaction under outcome-based control system.

Affum-osei, Asante, Forkouh, and Abdul-nasiru (2019) collected data from 443 service representatives working in telecom industry in Ghana to understand the impact of career adaptability on the ambidextrous behaviour and service performance. The study also explores (a) the mediating role of the ambidextrous behaviour on the relationship between career adaptability and service performance and (b) the moderating effect of perceived organisational support on the relationship between the ambidextrous behaviour and service performance. Career control, career curiosity, career confidence and career concern were the four resources for career adaptability considered in the research. Out of the four, only two resources of career adaptability, that is, career control and career confidence, were related to the ambidextrous behaviour. For service performance, career concern, career curiosity and career confidence were significant. Although overall global career adaptability relates positively with the ambidextrous behaviour and service performance. Moreover, the ambidextrous behaviour is found to be positively related to employee service performance



and also mediates the relationship between career adaptability and employee service performance. Finally, employees with high perceived organisational support manifest higher levels of the ambidextrous behaviour and service performance.

#### New and Existing Product Selling Ambidexterity

Van Der Borgh and Schepers (2014) surveyed 104 sales representatives from a European consumer electronics retailer to advance how retail managers can guide salesperson in selling new and existing products to optimise net profits. The findings advocate a negative impact of sales manager's ambidextrous orientation on salesperson's performance in selling new and existing products. The salesperson's performance for new and existing products is found to be in congruent with the sales manager's orientation for new and existing products. The salesperson's degree of task autonomy depicts a strong relationship with the salesperson's performance of new products when compared with the existing ones. This relationship weakens when the sales manager possesses an orientation for new products and becomes stronger when the sales manager is inclined towards selling of the existing products or adopts an ambidextrous selling approach. Performance feedback mitigates the impact of task autonomy on new product performance and amplifies the impact of task autonomy on the existing product performance. Moreover, age strengthens the relationship between task autonomy and performance in selling both new and existing products.

van der Borgh et al. (2017) surveyed 154 sales personnel of a European ICT company to assess how field salespeople can be influenced to proactive selling of new and existing products. Their study undertakes the impact of two different guidance mechanisms: (a) structural, that is, salesperson's organisational identification and (b) situational, that is, sales manager's product-selling ambidexterity. The results indicate a positive effect on both organisational identification and sales manager product selling ambidexterity on the proactive selling of new and existing products. Organisational identification depicts a stronger effect on salesperson ambidexterity than sales management product selling ambidexterity. Sales manager's new products' selling orientation is positively related to the proactive sale of new products by the salesperson. Although it has a negative effect on the sale of the existing products by the salesperson. While the sales manager's orientation towards the existing products is positively related to the proactive sale of these products by the salesperson but do not have any impact on the sale of new products.

## **Ambidexterity in Acquisition and Retention of Customers**

DeCarlo and Lam (2016) conducted three studies to assess the ambidexterity in retention and acquisition of customers. The objectives of their research were to find as to why salespersons develop a preference for farming over hunting and vice versa and to carve out factors to alter this orientation. The first study that consisted of in-depth interviews of seven sales and human resource managers revealed that in personal selling, hunting and farming orientation possess distinct trait-like individual motivations. The traits like risk-taking, desire to win, positive outcome focus and so on were used to denote hunters, whereas routine preference, less aggressiveness and analytical were mentioned for farmers. For the other two studies, the responses were collected from 357 and 200 salespersons, respectively. The findings revealed that salesperson promotion focus is positively related to hunting orientation and salesperson prevention focus is positively related to farming orientation. Interestingly, the salespersons who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to be the hunters. Moreover, the ambidextrous salespersons produce higher profit margins when they are also highly customer-oriented. High expected hunting success is positively related to hunting orientation but weakens the relationship between promotion focus and hunting orientation. On the other hand, it strengthens the relationship between prevention focus and hunting orientation. Furthermore, acquisition-based compensation plans are positively related to salesperson hunting orientation, and similar to expected hunting success, it attenuates the impact of promotion focus on hunting orientation and amplifies the impact of salesperson prevention focus on hunting orientation.

By collecting data from 174 sales managers of Italian firms through a questionnaire, Nijssen et al. (2017) identified how incentive management, sales training and cross-functional cooperation capabilities assist in creating ambidextrous sales organisations. The findings reveal that among the three constructs, only two of them, that is, sales incentives and cross-functional cooperation, depict a direct effect on salesperson ambidexterity. Furthermore, with strong cross-functional capabilities, sales-training capabilities also show a positive effect on sales organisation ambidexterity.

Lam, DeCarlo, and Sharma (2019) performed two studies to assess how customer base size and customer base newness impact salesperson orientation ambidexterity. The sample size for two studies was 357 and 194, respectively. The findings suggest that with large customer base size, high hunting and farming orientation salespersons ripe higher sales revenue. When the customer base size is small, the mono-dextrous salespersons are better in producing higher sales. Newness in customer base, due to recent hunting success, makes

salesperson to allocate time to farming depicting that hunting is not self-iterative and does not lead to success trap.

Table 2: Frontline Sales Employee Ambidexterity: *Dimensions and Industries*

<b>Ambidexterity Dimensions</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Industry</b>
Sale and service	Ahearne et al. (2007)	Pharmaceutical
Sale and service	Jasmand et al. (2012)	Call center
Sale and service	Yu et al. (2013)	Banking
Cross-selling and service	Patterson et al. (2014)	Service
New and existing products	Van Der Borgh and Schepers (2014)	Retail
Sale and service	Yu et al. (2015)	Banking
Sale and service	Sok et al. (2016)	Pharmaceutical
Flexibility and efficiency	Kao and Chen (2016)	Aviation
Sale and service	Agnihotri et al. (2017)	Different industries
Acquisition and retention (hunting and farming)	De Carlo and Lam (2016)	Publicly traded industrial distributed firms
Sale and services	Rapp et al. (2017)	Hospitality
Acquisition and retention	Nijssen et al. (2017)	No specific industry
Service–sale	Faia and Vieira (2017)	Banking
New and existing products	Van der Borgh et al. (2017)	ICT
Service–sales	Ogilvie et al. (2017)	Hospitality
Efficiency and flexibility	Yu et al. (2018)	Hospital
Hunting and farming	Lam et al. (2019)	Publicly traded industrial distributed firms
Service–sales	Affum-osei et al. (2019)	Telecom

## **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The glimpse of the studies exploring ambidextrous selling behaviour of the FLEs offers important suggestions for managerial practices. The employees with high self-efficacy, locomotion orientation and who possess drive to work motivation (Jasmand et al., 2012; Patterson et al., 2014; Sok et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2015) are more conducive to be ambidextrous. While recruiting new employees, the managers could assess the applicant on these factors to recruit those who are basically internally motivated to pursue dual goals. For those employees who are currently working but lack the above-mentioned attributes, training sessions can be organised to infuse the sense of self-efficacy and other motivational orientations among them which will make them more favourable to be ambidextrous.

Apart from that, empowerment, transformational leadership (Yu et al., 2013), LMX (Patterson et al., 2014), confidence in operational manager (Yu et al., 2015) and sales manager orientation (van der Borgh et al., 2017) are some key factors related to sales managers. There is a need to give more authority to sales employees so that they are directed to pursue dual goals, as the sense of being empowered makes the employees more confident. When the managers lead by examples and demonstrate their own prowess in achieving dual goals, it reinforces the employees to carry out the same. Moreover, the managers should maintain a healthy relationship with their subordinates in a way which fuses the employees with confidence in them.

The organisations should create a proactive environment that supports and enhances service and sales goals as employee's behaviours are the outcome of the perception of the organisational climate. When the employees perceive that the organisations support the service–sales goals and rewards for the same, then the sales employees will automatically inhibit the same (Affum-osei et al., 2019; Ogilvie et al., 2017; Patterson et al., 2014). The organisational should motivate their sales employees by providing high incentives in case they achieve dual goals. Different departments in the organisations must work together to synergise the ambidextrous potential of the sales employees (Nijssen et al., 2017).

## **CONCLUSION**

As noted earlier, this article aimed to find out various situations depicting the ambidextrous selling behaviour of the FLEs. After reviewing the articles published on the subject, we found that there are three instances whereby a frontline sales or service employee acts ambidextrously. The first dimension showing ambidexterity is to render service while selling or selling while providing service; most studies done on this dimension advocated for greater

customer satisfaction and increased performance (Jasmand et al., 2012) of employees when employees are ambidextrous. It may be due to the fact that by being ambidextrous, the employees are proactive in understanding their customers and explore for the new ways to delight them. Another ambidexterity situation that is found in the literature is the selling of both new and existing products. It is a situation where a sales representative has to achieve sales targets for both existing and new products; the existing products are well-known in the market with which both the sales representative and customers are familiar; on the other hand, new products are unfamiliar to the market and carry some sort of risk that if they do not perform as per the customer's desire then it may result in customer churn as these products are unproven (van der Borgh et al., 2017). Finally, acquisition of new customer, that is, hunting orientation, and retaining the older ones, that is, farming orientation, depicts the third dimension of selling ambidexterity. The salespersons who carry both these orientations simultaneously generate more profit margins when compared with those who are carry single orientation. The other objective was to find the antecedents of ambidexterity at FLE level which is achieved by identifying two broad categories of antecedents of selling ambidexterity of the FLEs, that is, internal and external antecedents. Internal antecedents represent the internal state of the desire of an individual to be ambidextrous and achieve dual goals, whereas external antecedents are the situational or organisational factors that lead to the ambidextrous behaviour. For the accomplishment of our third objective, which was to identify the areas that are overlooked till date by researchers, a separate section at the end of in this article is devoted as direction for future researches.

### **Suggestions for future research**

To apprehend the ambidextrous behaviour of the FLE, the researches had undertaken to assess the following: performance of ambidextrous employees, impact of leader relationship on ambidexterity, effect of the control system on the ambidextrous behaviour, ambidexterity in selling new and existing products, service–sales, hunting–farming, efficiency–flexibility and so on as the understanding of ambidexterity at an individual FLE level is still emerging and much more is still overlooked. This section is dedicated to providing new areas on which the ambidexterity scholars may work to provide more ‘dexterity’ to ambidexterity at the FLE level.

### **Ambidexterity and work–life balance**

Ambidexterity deals with the simultaneous handling of confronting demands of exploration and exploitation to which Gupta, Smith, and Shalley (2006) claim that it is easier for an

organisation to be ambidextrous when compared to an individual. Hence, to comprehend the impact of the ambidextrous behaviour on individual employee's life, there is a need to analyze the work–life balance of an ambidextrous employee. Moreover, a comparative assessment of the work–life balance of employee with dual orientation (ambidexterity) and with a single orientation may also be made.

### **Innate and imposed ambidexterity**

The work by Kao and Chen (2016) reflected the positive impact of intrinsic motivation on employee ambidexterity, while the studies by Nijssen et al. (2017) and van der Borgh et al. (2017) showed the effect of external factors such as manager's orientation and organisational capabilities on ambidextrous performance of employees; referring to that, a new dimension regarding ambidexterity can come into consideration, that is, 'innate' and 'imposed' ambidexterity, whether ambidexterity is the outcome of the individual internal desire to be multi-tasking or it is something that an employee perceives as a burden that a demanding organisation imposes on them. Further researches will be of great importance in finding the differences in antecedents of the innate and imposed ambidexterity and carving out the measures to effectively manage these two types of ambidexterity.

### **Customer and organisation orientation**

Till date, the ambidextrous behaviour of the employees that is being studied is customer-oriented only, whereby an employee is focused to provide service–sale, selling new and existing products and retaining hunting for customers only. Researches need to be conducted to assess the ambidextrous behaviour of the FLEs with both customer and organisation orientation. For instance, think of a salesperson responsible for selling goods to serve his customer, that is, customer orientation, and with that, he or she is also responsible to collect revenues from the customer, that is, organisation orientation. In both the cases, there lies a difference in the behaviour of the salesperson because at the time of 'selling', the salesperson needs to be soft and exhibit friendly behaviour to the customer; while at the time of 'collection' especially when the customer delays the payment, the salesperson needs to deal him in a different way to recover the money without leading to customer churn.

### **Growth opportunities for ambidextrous employees**

Extant sales literature has witnessed an enhanced performance of ambidextrous employees related to the achievement of sales targets and customer satisfaction, but none of the studies to date has shown how much these ambidextrous employees are more likely to be promoted

by their organisations. The area of study may be whether ambidextrous employees are promoted to higher levels faster than non-ambidextrous employees.

### **Gender-wise differentiation in ambidexterity**

Women in this era constitute for a substantial part of the workforce, and according to a report by the World Bank, the percentage of women in the total workforce was 39.22% in 2018 (World Bank, 2019). Moreover, there are various key positions in an organisation which is reserved for women or they are preferred over men for those positions. With the considerable amount of differences in attitudes, habits, behavior and likes–dislikes of women when compared with men, there is a need to study whether or not there exists a difference in ambidextrous behaviour of women employees when compared with men employees and to envisage for better managing ambidextrous women workforce.

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