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## **A Wisdom-Based Salesforce Development Model: The Role of Wisdom in Salesforce Training and Well-Being**

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# A wisdom-based salesforce development model: the role of wisdom in salesforce training and well-being

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## ABSTRACT

The prevalence of various salesforce job stressors call for an alternative to the current salesforce training and management strategy to secure the balanced proficiency development in job skills, prosocial abilities, and personal well-being. Specifically, we compare the well-being of 258 salespeople with 153 non-sales adults. We also investigate the relationship between wisdom and life satisfaction among salespeople, and moderation effect of age on the relationship. In regression analysis, wisdom scores of salespeople were positively related to life satisfaction moderated by age. The association between wisdom and life satisfaction was significantly stronger for older rather than younger salespeople. The findings suggest that a wisdom-based salesforce development model might result in a more balanced improvement in the mastery of job requirements, the interactions between seasoned and new salespeople, and personal well-being.

## KEYWORDS

Salesperson; salesforce training; wisdom; well-being; life satisfaction

## Introduction

In recent years, the service-producing sector accounts for almost three out of every four jobs in the US economy (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018) and is expected to lead the most job growth between 2014 and 2024, adding another 10 million jobs (Henderson 2015). With the increasing demands, salesforce training and management becomes a crucial strategic process of many firms. According to the American Society for Training and Development, American companies spend \$20 billion annually on salesperson training programs (Behar 2014) to secure the acculturation of new hires and the continuing development and management of experienced salespeople in the hope of improving overall productivity and well-being (Henderson 2015).

Despite significant investment, salesforce training and management do not seem to have much impact on either job productivity or subjective well-being. According to a McKinsey survey, 75% of senior managers said that their training programs failed to improve business performance, acknowledging a lack of appropriate training content and assessment tools (DeSmet, McGurk, and Schwartz 2010). In the same vein, a recent book *Examining the Role of Well-Being in the Marketing Discipline* (Perrewé and Harms 2019) indicates that job stressors are still prevalent and the well-being of salespeople is persistently low. More specifically, previous research has shown that the salesforce struggles with a high turnover and burnout rate (Bande et al. 2015; Boles et al. 2012; Brotheridge and Grandey 2002; Brown and Peterson 1993), lack of job security (Kim and von dem Knesebeck 2015), and low engagement and job satisfaction

(Fox and Spector 2005). These stressors can result in a noticeably lower level of general well-being and life satisfaction in salespeople (Lewin and Sager 2009; Moncrief et al. 1997; Perrewé and Harms 2019; Sand and Miyazaki 2000).

We argue that the strain in aligning salesforce development strategies with organizational goals is associated with a lack of training content that promotes balanced knowledge and wisdom on self-management, and the interpersonal exchanges of know-hows and wisdom between seasoned and new salespeople, in addition to building required skill sets. The most apparent requirement in need for salesforce training and management, in this regard, is a theoretical framework to promote both productivity and personal well-being as an alternative to the current 'hard' skill-focused salesforce development model (DeSmet et al. 2010).

Several attempts have been made as novel resource-based theories for this matter. Barbara Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson 2001, 2013) drew attention to the power of positive thoughts and emotions as prerequisites for skill and resource development. The Conservation of Resource Theory (COR; Hobfoll 1991) postulates that motivated individuals handle stress more efficiently by maintaining current resources and pursuing new resources at the same time. The Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R; Bakker and Demerouti 2007) focuses on the imbalance between job demands on the individual and the available resources as an important contributing factor to employee well-being.

These resource-based alternatives, however, have been under scrutiny in several review and meta-analytic studies (Sanchez 2008; Kraaijenbrink, Spender, and Groen 2010) for

their psychology-focused approach with thus confined definition of ‘resources’. The critique suggests that the training components of required skillset development should be multidimensional: addressing diverse needs of trainees that include not only job-related knowledge and skill obtainment but also sagacity and wisdom development as an important personal resource to deal with life vicissitudes over the life course (Sanchez 2008; Kraaijenbrink, Spender, and Groen 2010).

To our knowledge, few studies have used this holistic, wisdom-based approach to measure the well-being and its association with multidimensional training needs of salespeople. Few exceptions or approaches can be found in especially management and leadership domains where, however, wisdom is still restricted for its knowledge-focused (Levy 2017), leadership-driven (Kessler and Bailey 2007), spiritual-based (Malloch 2017; Pruzan et al. 2008; Rothausen 2017), and task-oriented (Küpers and Pauleen 2016) approach, respectively.

In summary, this article makes three significant contributions to the sales literature. In consideration of the apparent gap in current sales literature and multidimensional training needs for salesforce over the career, we, first, suggest a wisdom-based salesforce development (WBSD) model as an alternative. As we provide more theoretical and empirical rationales of this new model in later sections, the multidimensional characteristic of wisdom (Ardelt and Oh 2015) would function as a perfect platform for addressing diverse needs of trainees over the lifespan and producing synergy with a total effect being greater than the sum of its parts (Bangen, Meeks, and Jeste 2013). Second, as it is critical for the sales domain to ask for a thorough assessment of current workforce well-being and a troubleshooting of the training approaches of firms, we highlight the current well-being level of full-time salespeople in the United States ( $N=258$ ) by comparing with 149 non-sales adults. Lastly, with the same sample of salespeople, the present study investigates the statistical association between the salesperson’s multidimensional wisdom scores and the well-being measures to examine how and to what extent the WBSD model can help firms achieve balanced salesforce development.

## The wisdom-based salesforce development model

Knowledge and wisdom are not synonyms. They both refer to the mind and an accumulation of thoughts and experiences, but they have real differences in their meanings and their applications in someone’s life (Ardelt 2004). Unlike knowledge, wisdom is the ability to discern and judge which aspects of that knowledge are true, right, lasting, and applicable to one’s life (Baltes and Staudinger 1993). It is also a deeper knowledge of the meaning or reason why something is, and what it means to one’s life (Edmondson 2013). Hence, if knowledge is information, then wisdom is the understanding and application of that knowledge. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts and information. Wisdom is the synthesis of knowledge and experiences into insights that deepen one’s understanding of relationships and the meaning of life (Ardelt and Oh 2015).

Wisdom has been studied for centuries, predominantly in philosophy and religion (Ardelt and Oh 2015). Recently,

other fields, such as psychology (Webster 2007), sociology (Ardelt 2003; Ardelt and Oh 2015), and business (Levy 2017; Kessler and Bailey 2007; Malloch 2017; Pruzan et al. 2008; Rothausen 2017) have also begun to study wisdom. Contemporary scientific studies of wisdom focus both on implicit and explicit theories of wisdom (Ardelt and Oh 2015). Studying wisdom from an implicit theoretical approach is based on the idea that wisdom is defined and explored by laypeople. Conversely, explicit wisdom theories are constructed by experts in the fields who study wisdom (Lerner and Overton 2010).

Even though no straightforward definition exists (Schmit, Muldoon, and Pounders 2012; Ardelt 2003), implicit wisdom theories agree that wisdom is a multidimensional construct (Ardelt 2003; Parisi et al. 2009; Schmit, Muldoon, and Pounders 2012). Clayton’s (1975) seminal research yielded three implicit components of wisdom that are among those studied today. They include affective, cognitive, and reflective components (Ardelt 2003; Ardelt and Oh 2015; Lerner and Overton 2010). The affective component of wisdom encompasses prosocial attitudes and behavior toward others (Ardelt 2003), compassion, and empathy (Lerner and Overton 2010). An individual who possesses affective characteristics is likely to be compassionate, sympathetic (Ardelt 2003), nurturing, caring, and forgiving (Ardelt and Oh 2016). The cognitive component consists of the ability to understand interpersonal and intrapersonal matters of life (Ardelt 2003; Ardelt and Oh 2015). An individual possessing cognitive characteristics of wisdom is likely to be knowledgeable and intelligent. The reflective component addresses self-awareness, insight, and the ability to see things and situations from different perspectives (Ardelt 2003).

As noted earlier, wisdom’s affective component helps to explain why and how salespeople build trust and transparency with their coworkers, clients, and customers, while the cognitive component addresses the profession’s need to incorporate ‘hard’ sales skills into better practices at work. The reflective component of wisdom has excellent potential to address the antagonism that often exists between the affective and cognitive aspects of a salesperson’s behavior and work ethic (e.g., too emotional versus too reserved), thus addressing self-care and examination needs and creating a balance between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skill development. Figure 1 illustrates the WBSD Model.

## Hypotheses

### *Assessment of salesforce training and well-being*

One of the currently dominant training approaches uses mass customization, in which learners are expected to customize their needs to the existing training platform (Kraiger, McLinden, and Casper 2004; Tharenou, Saks, and Moore 2007). This one-size-fits-all approach does not allow salespeople to develop and customize training content for meeting their own personal and professional needs, which vary over their developmental stages in both work and personal domains.

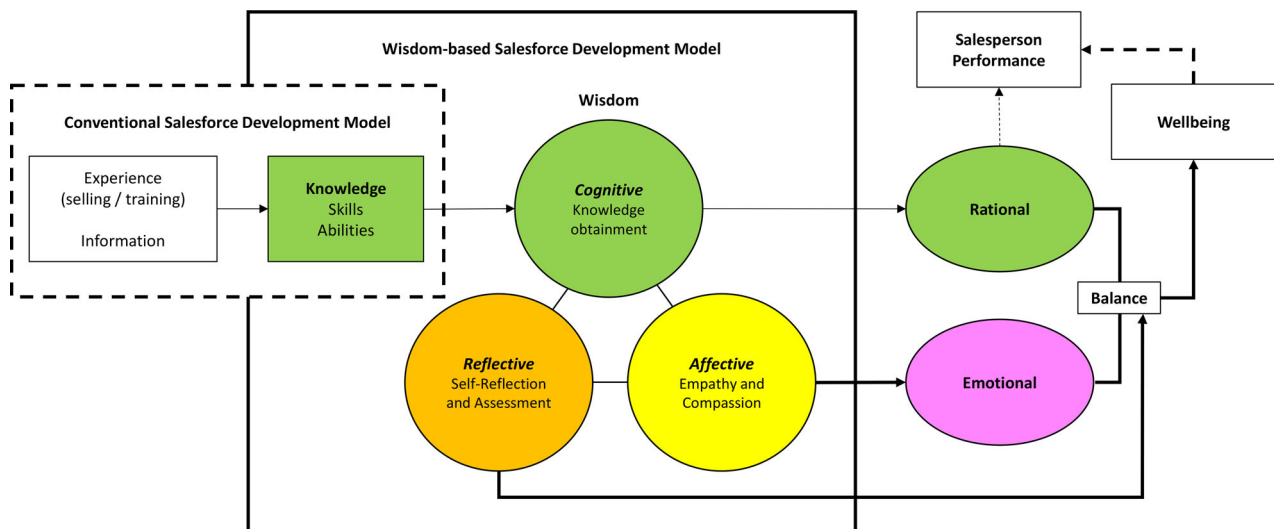


Figure 1. Wisdom-based salesforce development model.

Also, the existing training content focuses more on the development of ‘hard’ skills, such as the mastery of existent protocols and functional skills (e.g., selling techniques or customer segmentation) rather than ‘soft’, more holistic dimension of human development, which factors in positive behavioral change and adaptability, problem-solving by utilizing previous experiences and self-reflection, and prosocial interactions and communications with peers and customers across various age groups (DeSmet, McGurk, and Schwartz 2010; Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990; Doney and Cannon 1997; Lagace, Dahlstrom, and Gassenheimer 1991; Lussier and Hall 2018). Specifically, soft skills that are needed in handling interpersonal conflicts, family struggles, mental and physical challenges, financial insecurity, and stressful life vicissitudes (Dahm 2015; Miao and Wang 2017) effect job satisfaction and performance at work and vice versa. The current salesforce training, thus, needs to address the increasing needs for the balanced development of both skills to gain sagacity and wisdom for better decision-making, problem-solving, and perseverance (Dahm 2015; Miao and Wang 2017).

Moreover, the current training content pays less attention to developing positive behavioral change and adaptability, problem-solving by utilizing previous experiences and self-reflection, and developing social relationships and communication with peers at various stages of work and life experiences (DeSmet, McGurk, and Schwartz 2010; Tharenou, Saks, and Moore 2007). As a result, it misses the salesperson’s diverse needs for life-development stages in both work and personal domains. In sum, due to an inadequate training and management strategy for meeting personal and professional needs, we hypothesize that

**H1:** A salesperson’s well-being should be lower than the well-being of the Americans not in sales

## Wisdom and salesperson’s well-being

Wisdom is regarded as an ideal endpoint of human development (Staudinger and Glück 2011); hence, wisdom and well-being are inseparable. In order to cultivate and encourage

wisdom, there should be a rationale as to why wisdom matters in the first place. Overall, the positive effect of wisdom development on well-being has been well reported (see Table 1). Contemporary scientific studies find that wisdom has positive correlates with subjective well-being, such as life satisfaction, subjective health status, and the absence of depressive symptoms, such as a sense of alienation (Maddux 2018; Cicala 2014; Mulki and Jaramillo 2011). Subjective well-being (SWB) is a widely-used psychological construct concerned with how people think and feel about what they have and what happens to them (Maddux 2018). The positive effect of work-life balance on life satisfaction and job performance in sales is well studied (Bouzari and Karatepe 2020). Also, life satisfaction is known for its close relationship with subjective health status and a sense of alienation and vice versa (Maddux 2018; Cicala 2014; Mulki and Jaramillo 2011; Fillenbaum 2013). Especially, alienation is a recently reemerged well-being measure (Dunayevskaya 2018) in the midst of increased online sales and their consequences on the employee (Díaz, Martín-Consuegra, and Esteban 2017). Among the consequences of alienation are powerlessness, hopelessness, and social isolation (Cicala 2014; Mulki and Jaramillo 2011) which can be destructive to salesperson’s service quality, especially when the hopelessness culminates in the leaving of one’s position, or even the leaving of the profession. Table 1 summarizes representative wisdom measures and their correlates with various self-enhancing values.

Considering the close association of wisdom and well-being, the well-being score of a salesperson with a high wisdom score should be higher than the salesperson with a low wisdom score.

**H2:** A salesperson’s well-being is positively related with his/her wisdom level.

As wisdom development involves the practices of self-reflection and prosocial behaviors, in addition to cognitive, knowledge obtainment, a salesperson with a high wisdom score should have a more integrative understanding of wisdom than someone with a lower wisdom score, especially in

**Table 1.** Correlates of wisdom (based on Ardel and Oh 2015).

Wisdom measures	Assessment focus	Positive correlation with
Berlin wisdom paradigm (BWP) (Baltes and Staudinger 2000)	The cognitive aspects of wisdom-related knowledge in life planning, management, and review and the meaning and conduct of life	Emotional competence, Other-enhancing values (not self-enhancing values)
Wise reasoning (Grossmann et al. 2013)	Perspective-taking ability, consideration of the possibility of change, search for compromise and conflict resolution, acknowledgment of multiple possibilities, uncertainty, and the limits of one's own knowledge	Subjective well-being, Psychological well-being
Transcendent wisdom ratings (TWR) (Wink and Helson 1997)	Insight, self-transcendence, recognition of the complexity and limitations of knowledge, integration of thought and emotion	Most indicators of psychological well-being
Practical wisdom scale (PWS) (Wink and Helson 1997)	Personal cognitive, reflective, and mature aspects of wisdom	Most indicators of psychological well-being
Three-dimensional wisdom scale (3D-WS) (Ardelt 2003)	Wisdom as an integration of cognitive (a thorough understanding of the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of life), reflective (the ability and willingness to perceive things from different perspectives and an absence of subjective and projections), and compassionate (positive, caring, and nurturing emotions and behavior toward others) dimension.	Psychological well-being, Subjective well-being, Emotional competence, Greater self-efficacy, Empathy, Forgiveness of self, others, and situations, Emotional Intelligence, Self-Compassion
Adolescent wisdom scale (ASW) (Perry et al. 2002)	Intelligence, harmony/warmth, spirituality	Psychological well-being, Subjective well-being, Emotional competence,
Self-assessed wisdom scale (SAWS) (Webster 2007)	Critical life experiences, emotional regulation, reflectiveness/remembrance, openness to experience, and humor	Extraversion, Psychological well-being, Subjective well-being, Emotional competence, Greater self-efficacy, Empathy, Positive psychosocial values
Adult self-transcendence inventory (ASTI) (Levenson et al. 2005)	Self-transcendence	Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Psychological well-being, Subjective well-being, Emotional competence, Greater self-efficacy, Empathy, Egalitarianism

Note. Psychological well-being includes an orientation toward personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, autonomy, mastery, and/or positive relations with others.

Subjective well-being includes life satisfaction, happiness, general well-being, and/or absence of depressive symptoms.

affective (e.g., prosocial behaviors and tolerance to others) and reflective wisdom characteristics (e.g., learning from experiences and/or others, perspective-taking, and self-reflection).

**H3:** A salesperson with a high wisdom score should have a more integrative understanding of wisdom than a person with a lower wisdom score, especially on affective and reflective wisdom characteristics.

## Wisdom and salesperson's life cycle

Since a more satisfied, happier, and less depressive salesforce may generate more profits to the company, the diverse cognitive, reflective, and affective needs of salespeople over the lifecycle stages require a new salesforce development model. Such a model expects to promote a balanced knowledge development of salespeople and their wisdom that contribute to the organizational goal. Our WBSD model, therefore, can shed light on a more comprehensive training content that addresses a salesperson's diverse needs (e.g., intellectual, relational, and affective) over his/her career cycle and thus assists firms to align their resources more efficiently.

More specifically, a newly hired salesperson may have higher needs than a veteran salesperson for obtaining new knowledge. The acquisition of necessary selling skills and organizational vision, discipline, and structure takes a desire and motivation for obtaining knowledge and a willingness to understand situations or phenomena quickly and thoroughly. This *cognitive* dimension in knowledge enhancement and a 'hard' skillset development, however, cannot be the only focus in training. Firms should also consider the importance of 'soft' skills, which include collaborative

teamwork, positive and compassionate customer relations, and long-lasting, mutually encouraging social relations with a multidisciplinary workforce. These skills can be taught by promoting the ability and willingness to develop empathy, positive caring, and nurturing emotions and behaviors toward others, and the motivation to improve the well-being of others as well as the well-being of trainees themselves (Ardelt and Oh 2015). The absence of indifference, antagonism, or negative emotions can be learned as a result of this type of empathy and compassion training (Segal 2018). The enhanced social skills, as a result, may play a vital role in the longevity of the salesforce with higher job satisfaction, a better sense of engagement, and job ownership (Shalev 2017).

Likewise, as salespeople accumulate more experiences at work and in their personal life, they may have more needs for practicing self-examination and self-awareness. Insight into life, work, and the overall human condition can be obtained by the *reflective* component of human development, defined as perceiving phenomena and events from multiple perspectives through the practice of self-reflection (Ardelt and Oh 2015). For a more experienced salesperson, self-reflection requires not only cognitive knowledge and experiences from work and life but also the history of social interactions with others. As a result of self-reflection, they can help young and new salespeople transcend their subjectivity and projection, and instead increase an *affective* and compassionate view for others, which can help develop effective teamwork and partnership for the organization (Shalev 2017).

From a firm's perspective, this balanced, integrative wisdom development can be enhanced by collectively assessing each cohort's (new versus seasoned) forte and needs based



on the multiple dimensions of wisdom. That is, the rich life experience and the mastery of work can be the strength of seasoned salespeople, whereas the will for acquiring new skills, such as emerging sales technology and tactics, can be the forte for the young, new hires. Having better knowledge on each cohort's strengths and needs, the firm can leverage the synergy of inter-cohort exchanges in terms of increased motivation, longevity, loyalty, and productivity. With increased interactions, the seasoned salespeople can be motivated to obtain new knowledge and skills, and the new hires can develop more balanced, long-lasting wisdom in life and work. The age factor, therefore, can play a critical role in improving the salesperson's well-being and the firm's productivity alike by positively moderating (i.e., strengthening) the relationship between wisdom and life satisfaction.

**H4:** A seasoned salesperson with a higher wisdom score should have a higher life satisfaction score than a young, a newly hired salesperson (moderation effect of age).

## Method

### Design and procedure

#### Samples

We recruited a total of 311 full-time salespeople in the United States via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) (Oct 2018 – May 2019). After cleaning either unqualified or incomplete responses, 258 samples were used for the analyses. MTurk is an online crowd-sourcing system in which tasks are distributed to a population of thousands of anonymous workers for completion (Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011). Multiple studies found the crowd-sourced recruits were significantly more diverse than traditional surveys with participating companies (Casler, Bickel, and Hackett 2013; Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011; Burnham, Le, and Piedmont 2018), equally as representative as traditional recruitment method with realistic compensation rate (Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011; Engle, Talbot, and Samuelson 2020), rapidly and inexpensively recruitable (Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling 2011), and the data obtained are equally reliable as those obtained via traditional methods (Rouse 2015; Engle, Talbot, and Samuelson 2020).

Additionally, we used the premium qualifications services available in the MTurk by which we successfully filtered full-time salespeople from the MTurk populations. Also, we asked screening questions at the beginning of the survey. For example, we asked, "This survey is specifically for full-time salespeople in the U.S. Are you currently residing in the U.S. and a full-time salesperson?" and "This survey is for sales personnel in the U.S. How long have you been working in sales business?", followed by a question that asked a specific sales job title. The survey questionnaire was administered by using Survey Monkey, linked to MTurk, and made available to the participants. When the qualified participants completed the survey, which asked subjective questions about health status and life satisfaction, wisdom scale, and personal definitions of wisdom besides demographic

questions (a total of 43 questions with average 21 minutes for completion), they received \$2 through the Amazon payment system. The average age was 36.6 ( $SD = 11.2$ ), 54% female, and mostly Caucasian (75%) with bachelor's degrees with diverse work experiences in the sales sector (almost 45% for less than 5 years, 28.5% for 5–10 years, and 26.4% for more than 10 years of work experience).

For testing the first hypothesis, we used the comparison group (non-sales American adults) sample of 153 adults who had been recruited for an international wisdom study project led by the first author through university classes, community groups, local churches, and social gatherings, by using convenient sampling. The average age was 58.2 ( $SD = 25.5$ ), 51% female, and mostly Caucasian (78%) with more than 16 years of education. Each participant was asked the same survey questions we used to the sample of salespeople to obtain the self-report of their well-being measures and wisdom definition and endorsement on wisdom characteristics.

### Measures

All measures used in our study are well-established and widely used in the sales and psychology literature. We measured the well-being of the sales participants in three ways: We used three key components of Subjective Well-Being measure; life satisfaction, subjective health, and alienation. First, *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) is a 5-item instrument (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = slightly agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree) that measures general subjective judgments of one's life (Pavot and Diener 1993). For example, the items include 'In most ways, my life is close to my ideal', 'The conditions of my life are excellent', 'I am very satisfied with my life', 'So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life', and 'If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing'. Cronbach's alpha for the five life satisfaction items was 0.92.

*Subjective health* mean score was obtained by taking three health-specific items from two different scales. Two items (i.e., 'How would you rate your overall health at the present time?' and 'Is your health now better, about the same, or worse than it was one year ago?') were adapted from the Older Americans Resources and Services (OARS) Multidimensional Functioning Assessment Questionnaire (Fillenbaum 2013). The other item which asked, 'How would you rate your overall health as compared to other people your age – better, about the same, or worse?' was taken from the National Survey of the Aged (Shanas 1982). The first item which asked overall health at present used a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = excellent, 2 = good, 3 = fair, 4 = poor, 5 = very bad), unlike the other two times which used a 3-point scale (1 = better, 2 = about the same, 3 = worse). This five-point scale was converted into a three-point scale. All the scores of three items were reverse coded for better interpretation (i.e., the higher score of the scale, the better subjective health status). Cronbach's alpha for the three items was 0.70.

*Alienation* score was obtained from the average score of four items drawn from Seeman and Dean's seminal work on alienation (Dean 1961; Seeman 1959). The four statements, such as, 'I feel that my life has little meaning', 'I feel isolated and lonely', 'I have little patience with other people', and 'I am not optimistic about the future of humanity' are specifically relevant since powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation may pose a threat to a healthy psychosocial development in salespeople (Cicala 2014; Mulki and Jaramillo 2011). All four items used 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Definitely true of myself, 2 = Mostly true of myself, 3 = About half-way true, 4 = Rarely true of myself, and 5 = Not true of myself), and all the scores of four items were reverse-coded (i.e., the higher score, the worse the alienation). Cronbach's alpha for the four items was 0.74.

To measure the association of the well-being with wisdom (Hypotheses 2 and 4), and the role of multidimensional wisdom characteristics (Hypothesis 3), we measured the salesperson's wisdom score by using Ardel's (2003) *Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale* (3D-WS). Salespeople were asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with general statements in terms of the cognitive, reflective, and compassionate (affective) dimensions of wisdom, which has been found to be significantly correlated with other wisdom scales and well-being (Glück et al. 2013; Taylor, Bates, and Webster 2011). Specifically, the 14 statements of the cognitive wisdom dimension assess ability and willingness to understand situations or phenomena thoroughly, including the positive and negative aspects of human nature, and the ambiguity and uncertainty of life, and to make important decisions despite life's uncertainties (e.g., 'I prefer just to let things happen rather than try to understand why they turned out that way' – reverse coded). The 12 reflective items measure the ability and willingness to look at phenomena from different perspectives and the absence of subjectivity and projections (e.g., 'I always try to look at all sides of a problem'). The 13 compassionate items gauge the absence of indifference or negative emotions, the presence of positive, caring, and nurturing emotions and behavior toward others, and the motivation to promote the well-being of others (e.g., 'Sometimes I feel a real compassion for everyone').

All items were assessed on 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree or 1 = definitely true of myself and 5 = not true of myself) scored in the direction of greater wisdom. Computing the average of the scale items generated Cronbach's alpha values of 0.77, 0.73, and 0.71, respectively, for the cognitive, reflective, and compassionate dimensions of wisdom. A total wisdom score was computed by averaging scores for the three dimensions rather than the 39 items ( $\alpha = 0.71$  for the three dimensions and 0.85 for all 39 items). Cronbach's alpha for the three wisdom dimensions (cognitive, reflective, and affective) was 0.80, and each category has strong reliability scores (Cronbach's alpha: 0.75 for cognitive, 0.79 for reflective, and 0.80 for affective dimension).

Along with the key well-being and wisdom measures, we measured socio-demographic covariants, such as Years of Work in the sales sector (in years), Gender (1 = female,

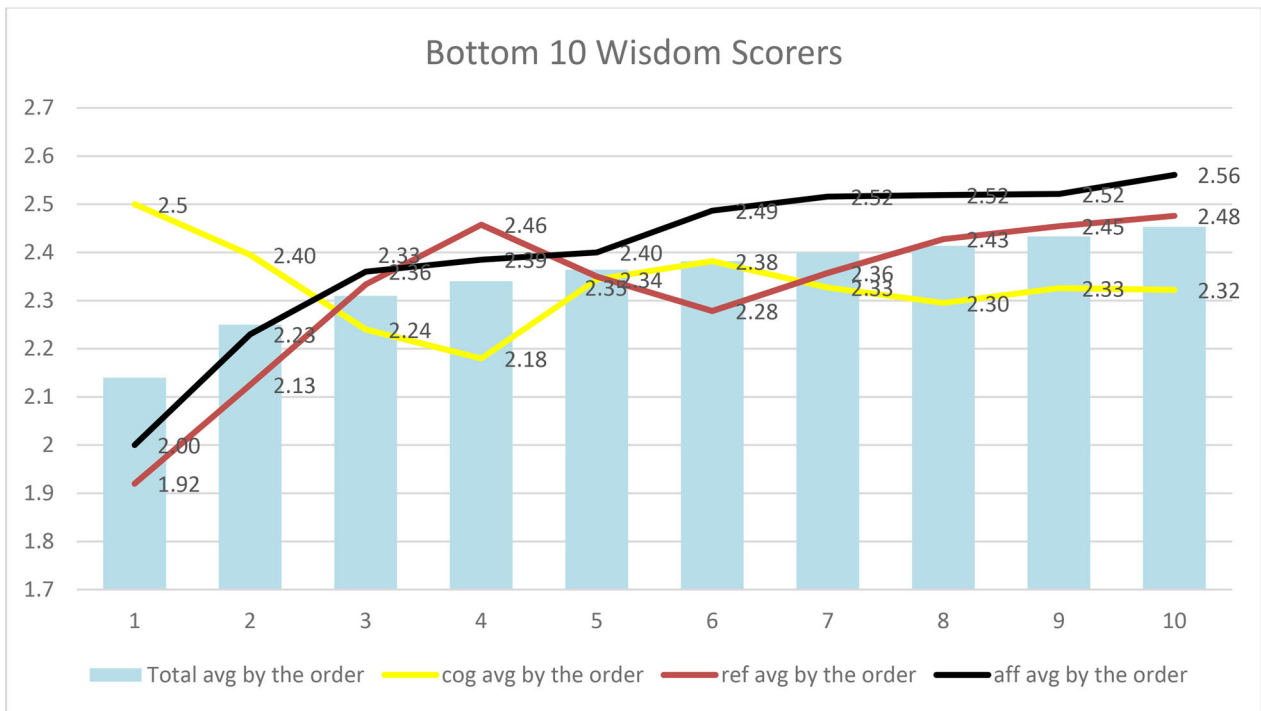
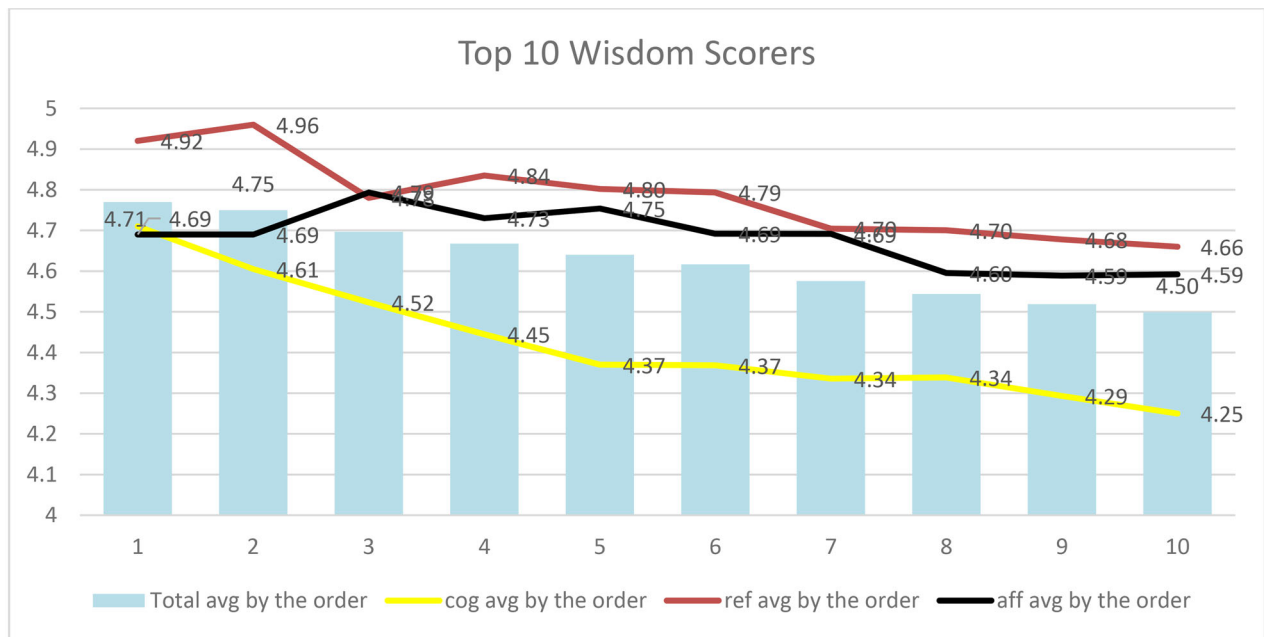
2 = male), Years of Schooling (in years), and Age (in years). Especially to test the hypothesis of the mediating effect of age on the relationship between life satisfaction and wisdom (Hypothesis 4), an interaction term between wisdom and age was created by the wisdom score and age. To reduce multicollinearity, wisdom and age both were centered at their means (Aiken, West, and Reno 1991).

In addition to the measures, we checked the integrity of the gathered data from the participants. First, we used G\*Power (Faul et al. 2009) to calculate the minimum sample size required to detect a relationship between variables of the present analysis. The present sample size of 258 was proved to provide sufficient statistical power to detect a medium-sized effect between the independent and dependent variables within a multiple linear regression model. Second, we conducted an outlier testing by using Mahalanobis Distance, Cook's, Leverage values, and a total of 15 cases whose summed scores of all these three values were higher than 2 were deleted (Dhakal 2017). After the outlier testing, we measured homoscedasticity, linearity, and normality of the data and the results indicated a satisfactory level of data integrity and normality with no significant problem with multicollinearity (i.e., Tolerance and VIF scores are within acceptable range. Hair et al. 2009, see Table 4).

### Hypotheses testing

To determine the mean differences of our target sample's (249 total salespeople after removal of outliers) well-being scores with the comparison group (148 non-sales adults) (Hypothesis 1), we first used the General Linear Model for one-way ANOVA analysis (Tokunaga 2018). Bivariate Listwise Correlation and Multiple Linear Regression analyses followed to further investigate how wisdom dimensions (cognitive, reflective, and affective wisdom characteristics) were associated with life satisfaction among salespeople, even controlling for socio-demographic and other subjective well-being factors, such as subjective health and alienation variables.

To test Hypothesis 3, we identified the top 10 wisdom scorers and the bottom 10 wisdom scorers based on the sales group sample's 3D-WS scores to compare their respective wisdom scores in cognitive, reflective, and affective dimensions. We chose this extreme case analysis approach to garner some valuable insights that can help generalize the findings to the population as a whole (Glen n.d.). To minimize potential selection bias of the extreme case sampling, we selected extreme cases from both ends of the spectrum (Collier and Mahoney 1996). More importantly, this extreme case analysis is in conjunction with our objective to find whether a salesperson with higher wisdom score has a more integrative understanding of wisdom than a lower scorer. To characterize what aspects of wisdom can play leading roles in its association with well-being more than others in two extreme groups, we used their accumulative mean scores and rank-ordered them, respectively. That is, each number on the X-axis (see Figure 2) indicates the rank of scores (1–10; 1 is the highest in Top 10 Wisdom Scorers and 1 is



**Figure 2.** Top 10 and bottom 10 wisdom groups' accumulated wisdom mean scores by the rank among salespeople sample.

the lowest in Bottom 10 Wisdom Scorers) and each number on the Y-axis refers to accumulated wisdom mean scores by each rank. For example, a mean score of 4.75 (Y-axis) for the number 2 (X-axis) in the graph of Top 10 Wisdom Scorers (see Figure 2) represents the accumulated mean score of the numbers 1 and 2 (the first top two scorers).

By visualizing these lines of the accumulated mean score for the top 10 and bottom 10 wisdom scale scorers in cognitive, reflective, and affective dimension, we expected to delineate what wisdom characteristics (dimensions) play leading role for a salesperson with a higher wisdom scorer in comparison to the one with a lower wisdom scorer. If our previous hypotheses were right, that is, overall well-

being of salespeople is lower than other non-sales adults and there exists positive association between wisdom and life satisfaction among salespeople, this extreme case analysis will strengthen our claim that wise people's higher life satisfaction is helped by their valuing on the integrative wisdom dimensions, especially reflective and affective characteristic as well as cognitive aspect.

For the final hypothesis, we tested the statistical significance of the interaction effect between wisdom and age, even controlling for other contributing factors. Then, we conducted a two-way linear interaction analysis to investigate whether the positive relationship between wisdom and life satisfaction was further influenced by age. With this



**Table 2.** Group differences on well-being measures.

	Salespeople ( <i>n</i> = 249) Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	Comparison group ( <i>n</i> = 148) Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	Mean differences with older group	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Life satisfaction	4.44 (1.65)	5.42 (1.12)	−0.98***	0.924	5
Subjective health	2.16 (0.49)	2.36 (0.41)	−0.2***	0.700	3
Alienation	2.61 (0.88)	1.93 (0.64)	0.68***	0.740	4
Overall wisdom	3.36 (0.48)	3.76 (0.40)	−0.4***	0.799	3
Cognitive wisdom	3.25 (0.54)	3.73 (0.58)	−0.48***	0.747	14
Reflective wisdom	3.53 (0.58)	3.93 (0.47)	−0.4***	0.791	12
Affective wisdom	3.30 (0.59)	3.63 (0.48)	−0.33***	0.799	13

The significance tests of mean differences are based on GLM – One-way ANOVA test.

\*\*\**p* < 0.01.

**Table 3.** Bivariate listwise correlations between life satisfaction, socio-demographic characteristics, self-rated health, and sense of alienation (*N* = 234).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
(1) Life satisfaction	–										4.52	1.61
(2) Years of work	0.03	–									6.96	3.69
(3) Gender (1 = female)	0.04	−0.07	–								1.48	0.52
(4) Years of education	0.02	0.02	0.06	–							13.14	5.01
(5) Age	0.06	0.51**	−0.15*	0.20**	–						34.75	9.72
(6) Total wisdom	0.33**	0.14*	−0.20**	0.02	0.20**	–					3.37	0.49
(7) Cognitive wisdom	0.14*	0.12	−0.21**	0.08	0.18**	0.84**	–				3.24	0.54
(8) Reflective wisdom	0.45**	0.18**	−0.14*	0.01	0.20**	0.84**	0.54**	–			3.55	0.58
(9) Affective wisdom	0.25**	0.05	−0.16*	−0.02	0.14*	0.88**	0.63**	0.60**	–		3.32	0.59
(10) Sense of alienation	−0.55**	−0.12	0.10	−0.02	−0.18**	−0.74**	−0.55**	−0.77**	−0.58**	–	2.58	0.89
(11) Self-rated health	0.61**	−0.03	0.17*	0.05	0.03	0.04	−0.09	0.18**	0.00	−0.28**	2.18	0.49

Note: *N* = 234; Pearson correlation coefficients (*r*)

\**p* < 0.05; \*\**p* < 0.01.

hypothesis testing, the result was expected to provide the current sales literature more insights on the existence of diverse needs of salesforce over the life cycle and the importance of exchange of know-hows and wisdom between different age cohorts among the salespeople.

## Results

### Hypothesis 1: group comparisons on well-being and wisdom measures

As Table 2 shows, the life satisfaction mean score of the salespeople group was 4.44 (*SD* = 1.65) (in between ‘neither agree nor disagree’ and ‘slightly agree’), which is significantly lower than the comparison group ( $F = 40.84$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This mean difference in life satisfaction is the largest among well-being measures (i.e., life satisfaction, subjective health, and alienation). Subjective health score for the salespeople group is significantly lower than the comparison group (2.16 versus 2.36) ( $F = 116.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) meaning their self-reported health is worse than the comparison group’s, whose mean age is 58.2, which is more than 23 years older than the mean age of the salespeople group. The Alienation score of the salespeople group is also statistically significantly higher than the comparison group (salespeople:  $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ , comparison group:  $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) ( $F = 68.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The mean score of the overall wisdom scale of the salespeople group was statistically significantly lower than the comparison group ( $M = 3.36$  vs. 3.76,  $F = 74.30$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) In all three wisdom dimensions (cognitive, reflective, and affective), the salespeople group’s means were lower than the comparison group and the mean differences were

statistically significant (Cognitive:  $M = 3.25$  vs. 3.73,  $F = 72.87$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; Reflective:  $M = 3.53$  vs. 3.93,  $F = 50.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; Affective:  $M = 3.30$  vs. 3.63,  $F = 33.61$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The sales group scored cognitive wisdom characteristics at the lowest, whereas the comparison group endorsed reflective dimension at the highest.

### Hypothesis 2: correlations and predictors of life satisfaction

Bivariate listwise correlation analyses (Table 3) showed that none of the sociodemographic variables (years of work, gender, years of education, and age) were related to life satisfaction among the sales group. However, the total wisdom score was significantly related to life satisfaction. More specifically, all three cognitive, reflective, and affective wisdom dimensions were significantly correlated to life satisfaction with reflective wisdom as the strongest relationship and cognitive wisdom as the least strong dimension. Sense of alienation had a negative relationship with life satisfaction, while self-rated health is positively related to life satisfaction.

Multivariate linear regression analyses (Table 4) were used to test how wisdom dimensions and well-being measures were associated with life satisfaction, controlling for other sociodemographic variables. As predicted in H2 and H3, salespeople who had higher scores on especially reflective and affective wisdom dimensions showed higher life satisfaction, even accounting for other well-being measures (i.e., sense of alienation and subjective health) ( $b = 40$ ,  $\beta = 0.378$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $b = 26$ ,  $\beta = 0.249$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , respectively). However, the cognitive wisdom dimension turned out to have no significant impact on life satisfaction ( $b = -0.11$ ,  $\beta = -0.10$ ) with negative standardized coefficient  $\beta$ . Subjective health

had a positive effect on life satisfaction ( $b = 23$ ,  $\beta = 0.178$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), while the sense of alienation influenced life satisfaction negatively ( $b = -0.16$ ,  $\beta = -0.221$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The model fit test results showed that the entire sociodemographic, wisdom, and well-being variables explained 56% of the variation in life satisfaction with significant  $F$  value, proving the validity of the present model for explaining the predictors of life satisfaction.

### Hypothesis 3: roles of wisdom dimensions between top 10 and bottom 10 wisdom group

Figure 2 shows the lines of accumulated mean scores for the top 10 and the bottom 10 wisdom scale scorers, detailed in terms of cognitive, reflective, and affective dimensions in addition to the total average bar chart as a reference by the ranked order. The salespeople with the highest wisdom scores keep their reflective and affective wisdom dimensions over the mean, indicating stronger endorsement of reflective and affective dimensions than the cognitive dimension. The cognitive dimension, on the other hand, has a stiff decline throughout the top 10 scorers and remains under the total average. The score gap between the cognitive and the total average gets wider toward the lower ranks (i.e., 0.02 higher than the average at the first rank and 0.25 lower at the 10th rank). On the contrary, the salespeople with the lowest wisdom scores have higher endorsement on the cognitive dimension, leading the total average score. Although the reflective and affective dimensions take over the cognitive

dimension later on, the cognitive line stays close to the other dimensions. On top of what we learn from the hypotheses testings so far, which proves that there exists (H1) low level of well-being and (H2) a positive relationship between wisdom and well-being among sales participants, this divergent trajectory of three wisdom dimensions between two extreme wisdom score groups highlights the importance of affective and reflective wisdom characteristics for improving salesperson's well-being and therefore productivity.

### Hypothesis 4: moderation effect of age

Nested multivariate regression analyses (Table 5) were used to test how age influences the positive relationship between wisdom and life satisfaction, controlling for other variables in a stepwise procedure. As found in the multiple linear regression (Table 4), overall sociodemographic variables (education, gender, and age) were not related to life satisfaction in Model 1. Overall wisdom showed a consistent strong association with life satisfaction (Model 2), supporting the significant effect of reflective and affective wisdom dimensions on life satisfaction (H2 and H3).

As Model 3 shows, age moderated the positive relation between wisdom and life satisfaction, indicating more seasoned salespeople with higher wisdom tend to have higher life satisfaction than the young, newly hired salespersons (H4). This significant moderating effect remained strong, even subjective health was taken into consideration in Model 4.

A simple slope test (Dawson 2014; Figure 3) indicated that the positive unstandardized effect of wisdom on life satisfaction was significantly stronger ( $b = 1.29$ ,  $t = 11.77$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) among seasoned salespeople than newly hired, young salespeople. Figure 3 also shows that among low wisdom scorers, life satisfaction tended to be lower among seasoned salespeople than young ones. However, life satisfaction of older salespeople with high wisdom scores became higher than that of younger salespeople.

The sociodemographic variables alone explained only 0.2% of the variation in life satisfaction in Model 1. Wisdom factor explained an additional 12.5% of the variation in life satisfaction in Model 2, and the interaction variable of age and wisdom explained an additional 1.5% of the variation in life satisfaction in Model 3. Taking subjective health into

**Table 4.** Predictors of life satisfaction among salespeople; multiple linear regression ( $N = 229$ ).

Variable	$B$	Std. error	Beta	Tolerance	VIF
Years of work	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.71	1.42
Gender (1 = female)	-0.09	0.06	-0.07	0.90	1.11
Years of schooling	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.92	1.08
Age	0.00	0.00	-0.06	0.66	1.51
Cognitive wisdom	-0.11	0.07	-0.10	0.49	2.05
Reflective wisdom	0.40	0.08	0.378***	0.36	2.81
Affective wisdom	0.26	0.07	0.249***	0.48	2.07
Sense of alienation	-0.16	0.06	-0.221**	0.33	3.07
Subjective health	0.23	0.06	0.178***	0.80	1.25
Model fit					
$F$	30.623***				
$R^2$	0.56				

\*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 5.** Predictors of life satisfaction among salespeople; nested OLS regression models ( $N = 244$ ).

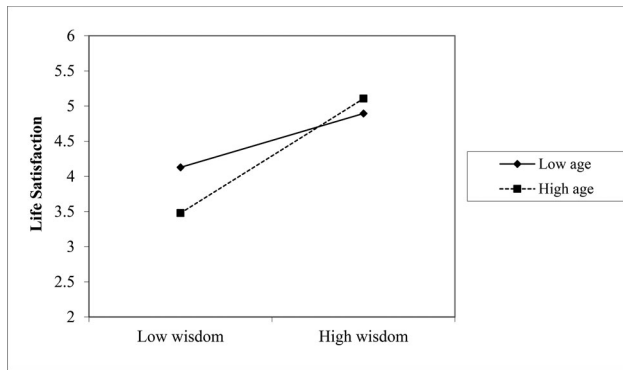
Independent variables	Model 1, $b$ ( $\beta$ )	Model 2, $b$ ( $\beta$ )	Model 3, $b$ ( $\beta$ )	Model 4, $b$ ( $\beta$ )
Sociodemographic variables				
Education	0.007 (0.023)	0.005 (0.014)	0.002 (0.007)	-0.014 (-0.042)
Gender (female = 1)	-0.110 (-0.033)	-0.302 (-0.091)	-0.287 (-0.087)	-0.048 (-0.014)
Age <sup>b</sup>	0.004 (0.026)	-0.004 (-0.025)	-0.011 (-0.065)	-0.010 (-0.057)
Wisdom <sup>b</sup>		1.245*** (0.363)	1.298*** (0.378)	1.152*** (0.336)
Age <sup>b</sup> $\times$ Wisdom <sup>b</sup>			0.045* (0.133)	0.035* (0.103)
Subjective health				1.932*** (0.577)
Model fit				
$F$	0.188	8.729***	7.972***	34.708***
$R^2$	0.002	0.127	0.143	0.467
$R^2$ change		0.125***	0.016*	0.324***

Note.  $N = 244$ .  $b$  = unstandardized coefficients;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficients

<sup>a</sup>Closest living includes coresidence.

<sup>b</sup>Variable was grand-mean centered.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



**Figure 3.** Interaction between wisdom and age on life satisfaction.

account further increased the explanatory power of the model by 32%. Overall, the variables in Model 4 explained almost half of the variation in life satisfaction (46.7%) among 244 full-time salespeople.

## Discussion

### General discussion

This study addressed how and to what extent wisdom understanding is associated with personal well-being measures and how the relationship between the life satisfaction and wisdom is moderated by age and its implications to the WBSD Model. The results support all four hypotheses: The salespeople sample's significantly lower well-being scores are congruent with their lower wisdom scores in comparison with average non-salespeople sample. As the association of subjective health and the sense of alienation are proven significant, the present study found the strong positive relationship between a salesperson's life satisfaction and wisdom, led mainly by reflective and affective wisdom dimensions. The findings also support that the salesperson's life satisfaction is positively influenced by his/her wisdom score, and this association is stronger for older than younger salespeople.

### Theoretical discussion

Developing as a professional, competent salesperson is an ongoing, lifelong process rather than merely something that commences or ceases when one enters into the field. Becoming a professional is not accomplished by taking in only a required job description, knowledge, and skills, but rather by applying this knowledge to one's needs, interests, and well-being (Levy 2017; Malloch 2017). Moreover, in a continually changing field, it is necessary to acquire new knowledge to remain competent. Wisdom's cognitive component supports the continuous acquisition of this new knowledge, while the affective component ensures the prosocial use of this knowledge in interactions with coworkers and consumers. However, only when a reflective component is also present are salespeople able to tailor the application of this knowledge for better, longer services accompanied by work satisfaction and personal well-being (Levy 2017; Ardel and Oh 2015).

Reflectivity also supports the processing and acceptance of mistakes made in service. Sternberg (1998) posited that

the differentiating aspect between wisdom and intelligence is sagacity. It is this aspect of sagacity that allows further development of wisdom for a better understanding of self by letting him/herself make mistakes, learn from them, and correct the mistakes. This sagacity, as Sternberg (1985) discovered in his multidimensional scaling analysis, allows individuals to immediately and efficiently disburse what they learn from themselves, others, and the environment while maintaining sound judgment.

### Managerial contribution

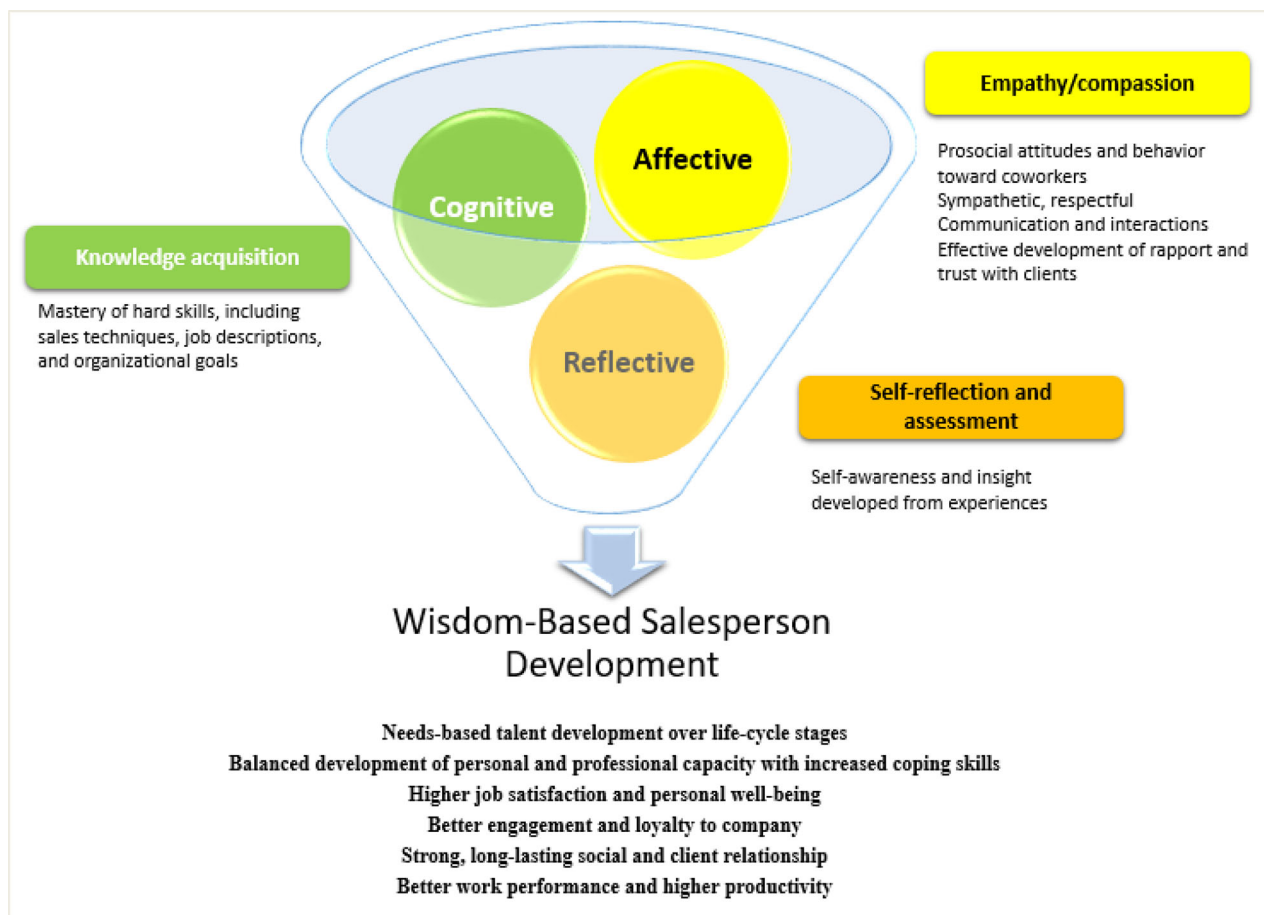
More specifically, salespeople can only give as much as they possess under the current hard-skill oriented training platform, missing the synergy from the exchange of cognitive, reflective, and affective attributes of wisdom between seasoned and new salespeople. This inter-cohort transmission of wisdom and knowledge is expected to generate benefits in a collective way by addressing the professional needs of salespeople more efficiently, promoting personal self-care and well-being, and increasing the effectiveness of salesforce training and management strategies, which result in the improvement of the value and productivity of both salespeople and firms.

### Limitations and implications

We should admit that the WBSD model is in its inception, which demands strenuous efforts to build its validity in the business literature. Also, this perspective should require a series of empirical investigations in practical settings for its practicality and effectiveness for salespeople and their employers, followed by developing customized training content and assessment tools to accentuate salespeople's talent, well-being, and contributions.

However, the unique contribution of the present study is paramount. We first found that the current well-being of salesforce was very low which is congruent with sales literature. We also proved that there exists positive effect of wisdom on the well-being of salespeople, and wise people's higher life satisfaction is helped by their valuing on the integrative wisdom dimensions, especially reflective and affective characteristics rather than cognitive, knowledge development only. In addition, we found that age has a moderating positive effect on the relationship between life satisfaction and wisdom among the salesforce, implying that the improved exchange of know-hows, life experience and wisdom between different age-cohorts among the salesforce may have a positive effect on the development of wisdom and well-being.

In summary, our research findings imply that the alternative salesforce training and management approach should adopt a wisdom perspective to encompass the dynamic developmental needs of wisdom characteristics, such as knowledge acquisition, self-care and empowerment, and prosocial behavior. Adopting a wisdom perspective can enable a contextual investigation of the development of wisdom and well-being among salespeople; that is, the WBSD model may function as a procedural reference from which salespeople can seek advice as they develop their careers over the course



**Figure 4.** Expected benefits of wisdom-based salesforce development model.

of their lives. Having an opportunity to make sound choices, especially during the early years of a professional career with the support of seasoned colleagues may ensure a legacy of good mental health, adaptive skills, perspective-taking, learning from mistakes, prosocial attitudes and behaviors, and, thus, the development of wisdom for salespeople, firms, and society at large. In this regard, the recent burgeoning on a within-person theoretical approach (e.g., Childs et al. 2019) in sales literature is encouraging for its new emphasis on the salesperson development over time.

With the pressure to continuously implement interventions and job training programs to the salesforce, and the weak impact of existent approaches as noted earlier, it is important that organizations recognize and develop training content that helps salespeople develop wisdom, to learn new skills from the programs, evaluate them, tailor them to salespeople's specific needs and wants over the life course, and implement them successfully into sales performance while securing personal well-being. Figure 4 shows detailed expected benefits of the WBSD model.

## Conclusion

The pursuit of contented and optimal living tends to function as our overall motivational device for wisdom development (Ardelt and Oh 2015; Baltes and Staudinger 1993; Bangen, Meeks, and Jeste 2013). Wisdom can help people to

make better decisions, be resilient in times of hardship, and develop prosocial, empathic attitudes toward others (Ardelt 2003; Bluck and Glück 2004). In this regard, the WBSD model can accentuate the potential return of training investments as a complete package of proficiency in required job skills, prosocial abilities, and personal well-being. As a result, individuals who develop wisdom garner mastery over their life and are comforted with having a purpose in life, which is a critical self-enhancing value for salespeople. Mastery of life can support self-care because it helps to preserve already established well-being when stress and adversity arise in the lives of salespeople. Hence, this could result in a salesperson's healthier performance at work, thus enhancing the company's profit.

## Declaration of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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