

**FRONTLINE BANK STAFF'S SOCIAL CAPITAL,
ADAPTIVE SELLING BEHAVIORS AND SALES PERFORMANCE**
VỐN XÃ HỘI CỦA NHÂN VIÊN TUYỂN ĐẦU NGÂN HÀNG, HÀNH VI BÁN HÀNG
THÍCH ỨNG VÀ HIỆU QUẢ BÁN HÀNG

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Nguyen Van Ha[✉], Nguyen Duc Dat

ABSTRACT

Understanding how salespeople's characteristics influence their effective selling as well as consequences of adaptive selling are important in managing the salesforce, given the growing complexity of selling settings. Drawing on job demands-resources framework and Stimulus-Organism-Response model, the purpose of this paper is threefold. First, we examine the impact of social capital on the adaptive selling behaviors of frontline bank employees in a relatively under-researched context. Second, several mediating mechanisms underlying this relationship are also explored in this research. Third, the effectiveness of adaptive selling behaviors is revisited by testing its effect on sales performance. Data have been obtained from 280 frontline employees working at Vietnamese commercial banks employing a questionnaire survey. Empirical analyses reveal that employees' social capital is positively related to adaptive selling behaviors, and that person-job fit and work engagement are significant mediating factors explaining the linkage between social capital and adaptive selling behaviors. Moreover, a positive association between adaptive selling behaviors and sales performance is also documented in this study. Our research findings provide important practical implications for bank managers.

Keywords: Adaptive selling; person-job fit; sales performance; social capital; work engagement.

TÓM TẮT

Trong bối cảnh các điều kiện bán hàng ngày càng trở nên phức tạp, việc hiểu rõ ảnh hưởng của các đặc điểm của nhân viên bán hàng đến hành vi bán hàng thích ứng cũng như hệ quả của bán hàng thích ứng là rất quan trọng. Dựa trên khung lý thuyết về yêu cầu-nguồn lực công việc và mô hình Kích thích-Cơ thể-Phản ứng, bài báo này thiết lập ba mục tiêu chính. Đầu tiên, chúng tôi xem xét tác động của vốn xã hội đến hành vi bán hàng thích ứng của nhân viên ngân hàng tuyển đầu trong một bối cảnh nghiên cứu mà mối quan hệ này vẫn chưa sáng tỏ. Thứ hai, chúng tôi xem xét một số cơ chế trung gian giải thích mối quan hệ này. Thứ ba, hiệu quả của hành vi bán hàng thích ứng được kiểm chứng bằng cách đánh giá tác động đến hiệu suất bán hàng. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ 280 nhân viên tuyển đầu làm việc tại các ngân hàng thương mại Việt Nam bằng cách sử dụng khảo sát thông qua bảng hỏi. Các phân tích thực nghiệm cho thấy vốn xã hội của nhân viên tuyển đầu có liên quan tích cực đến hành vi bán hàng thích ứng, ngoài ra sự phù hợp với vị trí làm việc của người lao động và sự gắn kết trong công việc là những yếu tố trung gian quan trọng giải thích mối liên hệ giữa vốn xã hội và hành vi bán hàng thích ứng. Hơn nữa, mối liên hệ tích cực giữa hành vi bán hàng thích ứng và hiệu suất bán hàng cũng được ghi nhận trong nghiên cứu này. Các kết quả nghiên cứu của chúng tôi cung cấp những hàm ý thực tế quan trọng cho các nhà quản lý ngân hàng.

Từ khóa: Bán hàng thích ứng; sự phù hợp với vị trí làm việc; hiệu quả bán hàng; vốn xã hội, sự gắn kết trong công việc.

1. Introduction

Social capital has received considerable academic attention over the past decades. It is commonly defined as “the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor's

social relations). Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it

Nguyen Van Ha, Nguyen Duc Dat, Foreign Trade University

✉Email: ha.nguyen@ftu.edu.vn

makes available to the actor” (Adler and Kwon, 2002, p. 23). Given its role of an intangible resource (Mathwick et al., 2008), social capital may facilitate both individuals and organizations in pursuing their specific goals (Adler and Kwon, 2002).

Frontline employees (FLEs) refer to those who in their work role have regular contact with the company’s customers (Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2011). In a market where customers can easily switch to the competitors like the banking industry, frontline employees’ behaviors strongly impact customers’ buying decisions. Previous studies indicate that social capital significantly influences individual career outcomes (Zhang et al., 2010) and organizational performance (Acquaah, 2007). However, little is known about the effect of social capital on frontline employees’ adaptive selling behaviors, which refer to “the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation” (Weitz et al., 1986, p. 175). As adaptive selling behaviors are important antecedents of customer orientation and job satisfaction (Franke and Park, 2006), which potentially have profound implications for the company’s longevity, it is necessary to expand our understanding on determinants of adaptive selling behaviors. This motivates us to focus on examining how salespeople’s social capital influences their adaptive selling behaviors.

Our study attempts to validate the impact of social capital on adaptive selling behaviors of frontline employees at commercial banks in Vietnam. With commercial banks continuously expanding their business, it is essential to enhance their frontline employees’ adaptive selling behaviors given that these employees interact directly with

customers (Scheepers and Borgh, 2020) and are responsible for establishing, sustaining, and enhancing customer relationships on behalf of their organizations (Baumann et al., 2017). Due to the increasing competition in the Vietnamese banking sector as a consequence of the country’s commitments when joining the WTO in 2007, this study is expected to provide useful insights into adaptive selling, which can be enhanced through salespeople’s social capital, and help maintain Vietnamese banks’ competitive position in their dynamic marketplace. In this study, we decompose social capital into internal and external components and examine their impacts on frontline employees’ adaptive selling behaviors based on job demands-resources perspective (Bakker et al., 2003). The association between social capital and frontline employees’ sales performance is also tested in our study. Using primary data collected from 280 frontline staff working at different commercial banks in Vietnam, we provide evidence that social capital enhances adaptive selling behaviors via person-job fit and work engagement. Our research findings also suggest a positive influence of social capital on frontline employees’ sales performance.

This study makes several significant contributions. First, we contribute to the social capital literature by identifying adaptive selling as a positive outcome of frontline employees’ social capital. Second, we complement the extant literature on adaptive selling by suggesting social capital as one of its important antecedents. Additionally, we highlight the critical roles of person-job fit and work engagement in mediating the association between salespeople’s social capital and adaptive selling. Last but not least, our research findings enrich our knowledge on the

relationship between social capital and adaptive selling behaviors by providing new empirical evidence from Vietnam. Although several studies have examined frontline employees' role in the Vietnamese banking sector (e.g., Dang and Pham, 2020; Le et al., 2022), our study is the first to explore the influences of frontline bank staff's social capital on adaptive selling behaviors.

The remainder of this study is as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant literature and develops our hypotheses. Research design is presented in section 3, followed by research results and discussion in section 4. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Literature review

Job demands-resources (JD-R) framework

According to the JD-R framework (Bakker et al., 2003), work characteristics can be classified into two main categories, namely job demands and job resources. Job demands are understood as job requirements concerning sustained physical, psychological, social and organizational efforts, and hence are accompanied by psychological and physiological costs. Job resources include physical, psychological, social and organizational attributes of the job. Job resources play a critical role in achieving job targets, reducing job demands as well as related psychological and physiological costs, and enhancing personal growth and development. Also, job demands may exert impact on job resources. For instance, job demands such as high work pressure and emotionally demanding interactions with customers may impair the mobilization of job resources (Bakker et al., 2003). In general, there is a negative

association between job demands and job resources. While job demands act as potential initiators of emotional exhaustion, job resources are considered as initiating a motivational process (Huang et al., 2019).

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model

The S-O-R model, initially proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), holds that some environmental factors lead to certain behavioral outcomes by provoking individuals' emotional and cognitive conditions. Three components included in the model are stimulus, organism and response. *Stimulus* is the influence that excites individuals. *Organism* refers to the internal process that mediates the linkage between stimulus and the individuals' behavior. Response refers to the consequences of the second component. Recent studies have extended this model to the domain of employee behavior (e.g., Tang et al., 2019)

Social capital

Social capital theorists (Adler and Kwon, 2002) suggest that working environments that foster trust, friendliness and goodwill positively influence work performance. Social capital, therefore, is commonly viewed as a valuable strategic resource (Luthans et al., 2004). The social capital literature distinguishes between internal and external social capital. The former focuses on relationships with other members of an organization, while the latter indicates connections with external parties.

Person-job fit

Person-job fit refers to the match between attributes of the person and those of the job (Edwards, 1991). The extant literature reports that person-job fit is important in improving employee well-being and performance at work (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). There are two primary aspects of person-job fit, namely

demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit. The former indicates the extent to which an individual's abilities are congruent with what the job requires. The latter is defined as the extent to which an individual's needs are satisfied by the supplies that stem from the job. While demands-abilities fit attends more to the job, needs-supplies fit focuses more on the individual.

Work engagement

According to Schaufeli et al. (2002), work engagement is a state of mind featured by vigor, dedication and absorption. Particularly, vigor refers to high levels of vital energy and mental resilience, dedication is defined as strong involvement in the work along with a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and challenge, and dedication is understood as being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in the work. Enhancing employees' work engagement is documented to yield significant benefits to firms such as fewer quality problems, better customer service, and superior sales growth (Viljevac et al., 2012).

Adaptive selling behaviors

Previous studies suggest that salespeople who actively adjust sales presentations across sales encounters exhibit a high degree of adaptive selling, while those who employ standardized sales presentations in different sales situations demonstrate a low degree of adaptive selling (Spiro and Weitz, 1990). Salespeople are expected to change how they sell based on customer feedback and information about the nature of the situation (Singh et al., 2017), given that there is no universally applicable sales strategy (Yoo and Todd, 2019). Engaging in adaptive selling behaviors requires salespeople to have basic information acquisition skills as well as knowledge about sales situations (Zhou and Charoensukmongkol, 2022).

JD-R framework and S-O-R model have been commonly used in researching individuals' behaviors. For instance, Li et al. (2021) employ the former to investigate the impact of hotel employees' intangible resources on their work-related stress and turnover intention in China and report the significant relationships. Lu et al. (2023) use the same framework to explore how sustainable human resource management contributes to better employee wellness and enhanced employee performance in China. While S-O-R model is more often employed to explain consumer behaviors (e.g., Kim et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2023), several studies have drawn on the S-O-R model to study employees' behaviors (e.g., Jung et al., 2021; Lee and Yoo, 2022). Following these studies, we apply both JD-R and S-O-R perspectives in our investigation of the social capital - adaptive selling relationship considering the roles of person-job fit and work engagement. Although this association has been analyzed in Korean context by Lee and Yoo (2022), we re-examine it in an unexplored research setting and expand their study by determining the impact of adaptive selling behaviors on sales performance.

2.2. Hypothesis development

2.2.1. The relationship between social capital and person-job fit

Frontline employees' social capital is expected to increase person-job fit by enhancing FLEs' abilities to meet their job's demands and fostering the congruence between FLEs' needs and the rewards originating from their job. As Cabello-Medina et al. (2011) indicate, strong social capital can improve employees' knowledge, skills and other abilities because social capital, manifesting in FLEs' daily interactions with their colleagues and customers, facilitates information sharing

and knowledge transfer. Employees equipped with such valuable knowledge and skills through a high level of social capital are better able to successfully address their job's requirements (Sanchez-Famoso et al., 2020), thereby improving the demands-abilities fit. Moreover, FLEs with a high level of social capital are likely to have more access to resources stemming from their job such as useful information received from colleagues and customers, better cooperation and coordination with people inside and outside their firms (Tang, 2016). Such resources supplied by their job enable better fulfilment of FLEs' psychological needs, which leads to the enhanced needs-supplies fit (i.e., person-job fit). Accordingly, the first two hypotheses are stated as follows:

H1: There is a positive association between internal social capital (ISC) and person-job fit (PJF).

H2: There is a positive association between external social capital (ESC) and person-job fit (PJF)

Dess and Shaw (2001) assert that social capital is a critical resource for both individuals and their firms. Social capital can increase employees' favorable attitude and behavior because close connections with colleagues help them feel more embedded in their firms (Mossholder et al., 2005) and more committed to their firms (Ellinger et al., 2013). Strohmgren et al. (2016) report that social capital significantly improves work engagement of healthcare professionals. We therefore propose that:

H3: There is a positive association between internal social capital (ISC) and work engagement (WE).

H4: There is a positive association between external social capital (ESC) and work engagement (WE).

Person-job fit is a crucial element in determining employees' attitudes towards work and their performance (Bui and Zeng, 2017; Wing, 2018). Scholars have emphasized the significance of high person-job fit, which is associated with positive outcomes in the workplace (Wing, 2018). FLEs whose perception of person-job fit is high are likely to be more engaged in their job because their values and identities can be embedded in their work (Guo and Hou, 2022). Kim and Gatling (2019) show a positive relationship between person-job fit and customer-contact hotel employees in the U.S. Likewise, Chen et al. (2014) find similar evidence in the Taiwanese hotel industry regarding the influence of person-job fit on work engagement. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: There is a positive association between Person-job fit (PJF) and work engagement (WE).

2.2.2. The relationships between work engagement and adaptive selling behaviors

Work engagement refers to a high level of simultaneous investment of personal resources in the performance of work (Christian et al., 2011). Ahmad et al. (2022) suggest that engaged employees are likely to devote more adequately of their time and talent to new solutions to tackle challenges from work. Menguc et al. (2013) hold that engaged employees find their jobs more meaningful and inspirational, and thus they take a proactive approach in handling their work including providing excellent services to their customers. Therefore, work engagement should positively influence the practice of ASB. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H6: There is a positive association between work engagement (WE) and adaptive selling behaviors (ASB).

2.2.3. *The mediating roles of person-job fit and work engagement*

This study draws on the stimulus-organism-response model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) in examining two internal mechanisms through which social capital impacts FLEs' adaptive selling behaviors: person-job fit and work engagement. This theoretical approach rests on how individuals' emotional judgement of a stimulus could drive their behaviors. Against this background, we maintain that social capital acts as a stimulus that influences FLEs' feelings and perceptions. For organisms, person-job fit and work engagement are postulated as the internal state experienced by FLEs when developing social capital inside and outside their firms. Adaptive selling behaviors serve as response. As such, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7. Person-job fit (PJF) and work engagement (WE) mediate the relationship between internal social capital (ISC) and adaptive selling behaviors (ASB).

H8. Person-job fit (PJF) and work engagement (WE) mediate the relationship between external social capital (ESC) and adaptive selling behaviors (ASB).

2.2.4. *The relationship between adaptive selling behaviors and sales performance*

Adaptive selling behaviors are said to work more effectively than any other communication channels due to salespeople's abilities to develop a unique message to match each customer's needs and preferences (Román and Iacobucci, 2010). The extant literature generally agrees that adaptive

selling is a significant determinant of sales performance, which is evaluated based on a salesperson's contribution to the organization's goals (Singh and Das, 2013). In particular, Zheng et al. (2023) report that ASBs positively and significantly impact sales performance in Chinese manufacturing firms. Singh and Das (2013) show a positive relationship between ASBs and sales performance in the Indian business-to-business insurance industry. Rapp et al. (2008) find consistent evidence on a positive influence of ASBs on sales performance using data from the human health-care division of a pharmaceutical firm. Parallel to prior evidence, this study revisits the linkage between ASB and sales performance in the banking industry and hypothesizes the following:

H9: There is a positive association between adaptive selling behaviors and sales performance.

Our above-mentioned hypotheses align with the view that employees' social capital is critical intangible resource that is value relevant to both the companies and individuals (Li et al., 2021). While empirical evidence largely supports favorable impacts of social capital on employees' attitude such as reduced work stress and turnover intention (Dess and Shaw, 2001), Moynihan and Pandey (2008) indicate that the relationship between social capital and employees' turnover intention may be negative because employees with better social capital have more propensity to be offered a new job. Given this relationship still remains ambiguous, it is an empirical question to be resolved in the current study.

3. Results design

Figure 1 exhibits our testable hypotheses:

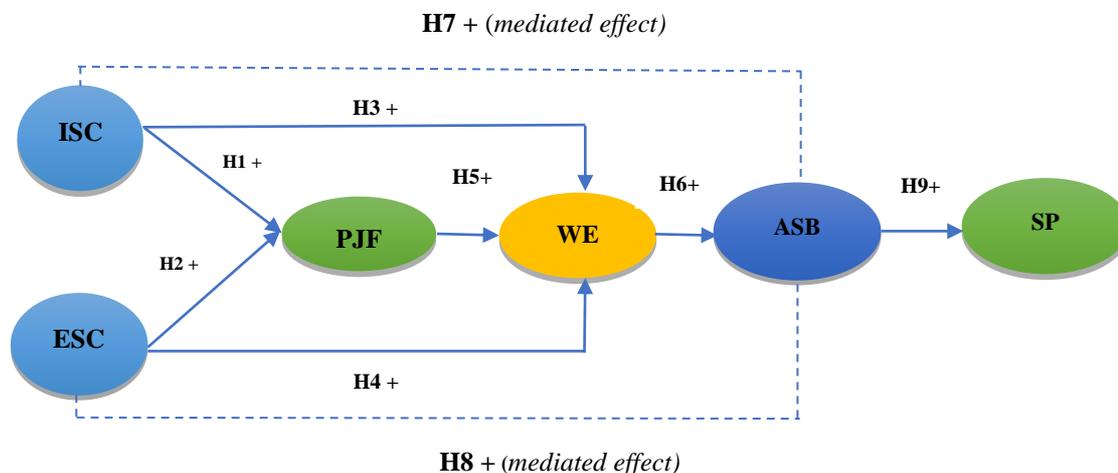


Figure 1: Research model

We collect data by surveying frontline bank employees in Vietnam through Google Forms, which are distributed to the authors' networks in the banking sector. Due to our time and resource constraints, convenience sampling is employed. The questionnaire explicitly states that it only surveys the frontline employees whose definition is clearly provided in the form. The measurement items used in this study are adapted from the extant literature. Four items are adopted from Krishen (2019) to measure internal social capital. Three items from the work of Biong and Ulvnes (2011) are used to measure external social capital. Person-job fit items are based on Saks and Ashforth (2002). Work engagement is measured with a nine-item scale from Schaufeli (2006). Adaptive selling behaviors are measured with six items from Miao and Evans (2013). Finally, seven items from Fang (2004) are employed to measure sales performance. In addition, respondents' demographic information including gender, age, educational background, and experience.

We use a 5-point Likert scale to measure all questionnaire items. These items are translated from English to Vietnamese employing back-to-back translation (Brislin, 1980).¹ A pilot test with the Vietnamese version of the questionnaire is conducted to ensure readability and clarity. Then the questionnaire is administered to the sample. After removing 20 cases with incomplete responses from the total 300 survey responses, the final sample has 280 observations. Respondents are 57.9% female, 43.9% in the age bracket 30-40 years, 89.3% with bachelor's degree, and 53.9% with job tenure ranging from 3 to 10 years. Distribution of respondents' workplace is shown in Figure 2 below.

¹ A back-to-back translation procedure involves two steps. First, one of the authors translates the questionnaire items originally in English to Vietnamese. Second, another author translates the Vietnamese version of such items back to English to ensure that the items' meaning remains unchanged.

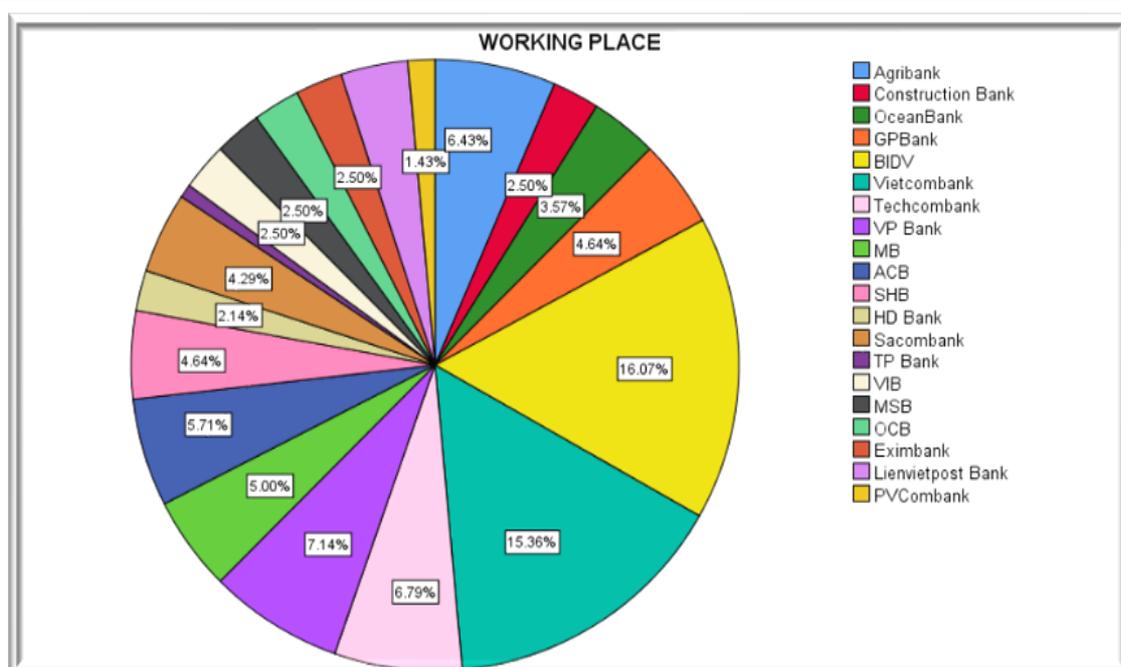


Figure 2: Distribution of respondents' workplace

4. Results

4.1. Data analysis

We follow the twofold procedure in conducting data analysis by firstly assessing the psychometric quality of variable measures, and then moving on hypothesis testing. Psychometric quality involves validity and reliability. Validity refers to the capacity of measuring what is intended, and is evaluated via both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Reliability indicates the consistent pattern of behavior of the scales embedded in the same factor, and is assessed via Cronbach's α . The research hypotheses are tested using structural equation modelling.

4.2. Validity and reliability of measures

The EFA is run using principal axis factoring with promax rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy of 0.912, which is well above the 0.7

threshold (Hair et al., 2010), implying that the data is appropriate for EFA. Bartlett's test of sphericity is statistically significant ($\chi^2=5.042,16$; $df = 496$; $p < 0,000$) indicating a strong relationship between the variables. The CFA also shows that the measurement model satisfactorily fits the data: $\chi^2/(d.f.)=730,58/449$; $GFI=0.86$; $CFI=0.94$; $TLI=0.94$; $RMSEA=0.047$. Moreover, the measured items demonstrate standardized coefficients ranging from 0.662 to 0.881, above the 0.5 threshold (Hair et al., 2010). The reliability of our measures is evaluated by Cronbach's α . Table 1 shows that Cronbach's α values all exceed the recommended value of 0.7 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The composite reliability (CR) of our constructs is between 0.838 and 0.905, well above the 0.6 threshold (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). The values of average variance extracted (AVE) also exceed the recommended level of 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 1. *Results of validity and reliability assessment of measures*

Variables and Items	EFA Factor loading	CFA Standardized coefficient	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
<i>Internal social capital</i>			0.882	0.884	0.656
Establishing stable relationships within the bank has earned me the respect of my colleagues.	0.727	0.765			
I am honored to be a part of the bank.	0.696	0.738			
I appreciate being a member of the bank.	0.866	0.847			
I have a deep sense of belongingness at work.	0.853	0.881			
<i>External social capital</i>			0.844	0.846	0.647
I have a close social relationship with my customers.	0.757	0.786			
I have a close business relationship with my customers.	0.840	0.848			
The relationship between me and my customers enables me to gain important insights.	0.747	0.776			
<i>Person-job fit</i>			0.837	0.838	0.566
The job is a good fit for me.	0.737	0.770			
The job satisfies my needs.	0.722	0.771			
My knowledge, skills, and abilities meet the job's requirements.	0.784	0.790			
The job allows me to do the type of work that I like.	0.602	0.673			
<i>Work engagement</i>			0.901	0.905	0.543
I am really energetic when I am working.	0.696	0.745			
I want to go to work when I wake up.	0.747	0.721			
I am passionate about my job.	0.828	0.747			
My work keeps me motivated.	0.695	0.758			
I am proud of my job.	0.756	0.773			
Extreme concentration at work brings me joy.	0.632	0.688			
My work totally engrosses me.	0.712	0.762			
When I am working, I get very excited.	0.712	0.698			
<i>Adaptive selling behaviors (Miao and Evans, 2013)</i>			0.864	0.865	0.517
I am very flexible in the selling approaches I use	0.696	0.662			
I vary my sales style from situation to situation	0.703	0.748			
I tend to use a wide variety of selling approaches with different customers.	0.685	0.712			
I use different sales strategies with different customers.	0.695	0.726			
I do not use a set sales approach.	0.619	0.674			
I change my sales tactics from one customer to another.	0.705	0.784			
<i>Sales performance</i>			0.888	0.89	0.536
I contribute significantly to the bank's market share.	0.741	0.719			

I am effective in selling products and services that exhibit the greatest profit margins.	0.779	0.777			
I am effective in generating a great level of revenues.	0.731	0.753			
I am effective in generating revenues of recently launched products and services.	0.718	0.716			
I am effective in identifying major customers in my area.	0.690	0.740			
I am effective in selling to major customers.	0.754	0.740			
I am confident in surpassing annual sales quotas and goals.	0.677	0.673			

Discriminant validity is assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE for a specific construct and the correlation coefficients between that construct and all other constructs. As stated by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the former must exceed the latter to ensure discriminant validity. In Table 2, the diagonal elements of the matrix show the square root of the AVE, and the

off-diagonal elements demonstrate the correlations between variables. It is observed that the values in the diagonal are above the corresponding correlation estimates below the diagonal, therefore the requirement of discriminant validity is satisfied. Taken together, the results of above analyses confirm our measures' validity and reliability.

Table 2. *Discriminant validity*

	WE	SP	ASB	ISC	PJF	ESC
WE	0.737					
SP	0.389***	0.732				
ASB	0.652***	0.537***	0.719			
ISC	0.520***	0.361***	0.515***	0.81		
PJF	0.559***	0.336***	0.494***	0.538***	0.752	
ESC	0.508***	0.475***	0.453***	0.258***	0.503***	0.804

Source: Results of data processing via AMOS and SPSS

4.3. Hypotheses testing

Table 3 reports results of testing our hypotheses using the structural equation modeling. Direct effects concern the first six hypotheses and the ninth one, while indirect effects involve the seventh and eighth hypotheses. The bootstrapping method is employed to examine the indirect effects (Patrick and Bolger, 2002). Given that all coefficients of interest are positive and significant, our hypotheses described in section 2.2 are accepted.

Table 3. Results of hypotheses testing

Relation-ships	Standardized coefficients	p	Results
Direct effects			
H1	0.439	0.000	Supported
H2	0.391	0.000	Supported
H3	0.312	0.000	Supported
H4	0.307	0.000	Supported
H5	0.238	0.003	Supported
H6	0.426	0.000	Supported
H9	0.558	0.000	Supported

Indirect effects			
H7	0.104	0.004	Supported
H8	0.093	0.002	Supported

5. Conclusion

This study examines the influences of both internal and external social capital on adaptive selling and sales performance of Vietnamese frontline bank staff. Our research results report positive outcomes of both forms of social capital on adaptive selling behaviors and sales performance. We also find that such influences are mediated by person-job fit and work engagement. Given the significant role of bank frontline

employees in boosting adaptive selling and sales performance, bank managers should be aware of doable tactics for enhancing their employees' internal and external social capital.

Due to the relatively small size of the sample focusing on a single country, caution should be exercised when interpreting our findings. Also, other factors that may determine employees' adaptive selling and sales performance such as personal and cultural characteristics are still not examined in our study. These limitations serve as potential avenues for future research in this field.

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