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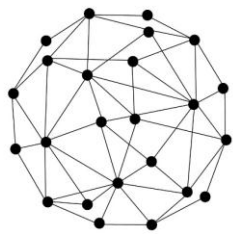
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## WHEN THE TEAM POTENCY NEEDS SELF-EFFICACY AND ADAPTIVE SELLING

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** We suggest that the effect of team potency on performance is not only direct, but also mediated by the mechanisms of self-efficacy and adaptive selling. The Cognitive Social Theory explains this serial mediation because the individual who has beliefs in his/her sales skills (self-efficacy), shapes his/her behavior congruent to that one from customer (adaptive selling). As a result, salesperson increases sales results.

**Method:** We collected data with employees from the front line of the banking segment. Through multivariate analysis, the authors confirm the hypotheses for individual and team performance.

**Originality/Relevance:** The Team Effectiveness Theory has shown that team potency positively increases individual performance. But, little is known about the influence of potency on team performance. In addition, we do not know the explanatory power of the effect of potency on performance, including indirect effects via mediation.

**Results:** Potency influences both individual and team's performance through self-efficacy and adaptive selling. Theoretical/Methodological Contributions: This paper presents an advance in the literature by associating team constructs with individual elements to obtain individual and team performance. In addition, the investigation contributes to Cognitive Social Theory and Team Effectiveness Theory by raising the explanation power of team potency in determining sales performance.

**Keywords:** Potency, Team, Performance, Self-Efficacy, Adaptive Selling.

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**QUANDO A POTÊNCIA DO TIME NECESSITA DA AUTOEFICÁCIA E DA VENDA ADAPTATIVA**

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**RESUMO**

**Objetivo:** Sugerimos que o efeito da potência do time no desempenho não é somente direto, mas também mediado pelos mecanismos de autoeficácia e venda adaptativa. A Teoria Social Cognitiva explica essa mediação em série, pois o indivíduo que possui crenças nas suas habilidades de vendas (autoeficácia), molda seu comportamento congruente ao do cliente (venda adaptativa). Como consequência, os resultados de vendas são melhores.

**Método:** Foram coletados dados com funcionários da linha de frente do segmento bancário, que, por meio de análises multivariadas, confirmam as expectativas dos autores, para o desempenho individual e do time.

**Originalidade/Relevância:** A Teoria da Efetividade do Time tem mostrado que a potência do time aumenta positivamente o desempenho individual, contudo pouco se sabe sobre sua influência no desempenho do grupo. Em complemento, ainda é necessário compreender o poder explicativo do efeito da potência no desempenho.

**Resultados:** A potência influencia o desempenho tanto individual quanto do time por meio da autoeficácia e da venda adaptativa.

**Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas:** Este trabalho apresenta um avanço na literatura ao relacionar construtos do time com elementos individuais para a obtenção de desempenho individual e do time. Em complemento, contribui com a Teoria Social Cognitiva e com a Teoria da Efetividade do Time, ao elevar o poder de explicação da potência do time na determinação do desempenho de vendas.

**Palavras-chave:** Potência. Times. Desempenho. Autoeficácia. Venda Adaptativa.

## INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly competitive sales environment, managing the sales team is a key condition for successful sales. The sales team can be understood as the formation of two or more salespeople who interact, have at least one shared goal, and present interdependence in the work (Hu & Liden, 2011).

Researches investigate separately the effects of sales potency, self-efficacy, and adaptive selling on performance (e.g. Ahearne, Mackenzie, Podsakoff, Mathieu, & Lam, 2010; Gully, Joshi, Incalcaterra, & Beaubien, Ruyter, & Wetzels, 2005). Despite the evidence from the previous investigations, two gaps remain.

First, Gully, Joshi, Incalcaterra and Beaubien (2002), Jung and Sosik (2003) and Stajkovic, Lee and Nyberg (2009) investigated the relationship between team potency and efficacy and found that both efficacy and team potency are related with the team performance. However, the authors did not suggest mechanisms of how this effect occurs. We suggest a mediating via through self-efficacy and adaptive selling because teams with a belief in their ability spend time and effort pursuing their goals, persisting in the face of difficulties and learning to deal with different sales situations (Maddux, 2000).

Second, Román and Iacobucci (2010) and Monteiro and Vieira (2016) found that the relationship between team potency and seller performance can be

mediated by adaptive selling. The theoretical explanation for the indirect relationship occurs because "sellers have the opportunity to obtain information and then develop and implement a detailed sale for each consumer characteristic" (Román & Iacobucci 2010, p.363). We advance in these findings and propose a serial mediation effect. Therefore, the potency of the team influences the self-efficacy, which in turn influences the adaptive selling, increasing the performance of the team and the individual. The foundation for serial mediation is in the Cognitive Social Theory, which clarifies that individuals, after believing in their abilities, take the perspective of change and adaptation, generating reciprocal interactional influences within a team (Bandura, 2001).

Table 1 summarizes the previous findings and presents how this paper advances in the literature. We used the team potency to influence both self-efficacy and adaptive selling, amplifying the findings of Stajkovic et al. (2009). In addition, we analyzed the serial mediation of self-efficacy and adaptive selling in the relationship between potency and performance, amplifying the findings of Monteiro and Vieira (2016) that presented a simple mediation. Finally, we measured sales performance both at the individual level and at the team level. In measuring in that way we expanded previous findings that were limited to individual-level outcomes (Fu, Richards, Hughes, & Jones, 2010; Román & Iacobucci, 2010) and the team level (Stajkovic, Lee, & Nyberg, 2009).

Researchers	Level of analysis	Analysis Techniques	Research context	Research gap								Main contributions	
				Potency performance	Potency	Potency Adaptive	Efficacy performance	Adaptive selling	Efficacy	Adaptive selling	Serial mediation: efficacy and adaptive selling	Individual performance	Team performance
Gully et al. (2002)	Individual and group	Meta-analysis	67 studies	X			X					Team efficacy and team potency have a direct effect on individual performance.	Team efficacy and team potency have a direct effect on team performance.
Jung and Sosik (2003)	Individual and group	Multiple regression and modeling of structural equations	106 students from an American university divided into 31 groups	X			X					-	Team efficacy and team potency have a positive impact on team performance.
Jong et al. (2005)	Individual and group	Multiple regression in modeling of structural equations	842 employees of 60 teams from a Dutch banking institution	X								-	Team potency have a negative impact on team performance.
Judge et al. (2007)	Individual	Meta-analysis	158 studies				X					Self-efficacy has a positive effect on performance measures related to work.	-

Stajkovic et al. (2009)	Group	Meta-analysis	96 studies	X	X		X		X			-	Potency exerts an impact on performance, but when collective efficacy is present, the direct effect of potency on performance ceases to exist.
Román and Iacobucci (2010)	Individual	Structural equation analysis	210 sellers in the financial services industry					X				The adaptive selling behavior has a positive impact on the subjective performance of the sellers.	-
Fu et al. (2010)	Individual	Structural equation analysis	534 sellers from the industrial sector				X					Self-efficacy has an effect on objectively measured performance.	-
Goncalo, Polman and Maslach (2010)	Group	Structural equation analysis	429 students of organization al behavior divided into teams				X					-	Collective efficacy positively influences performance over time according to conflicts generated between the group.
Schaubroeck , Lam and Peng (2011)	Individual and group	Structural equation analysis	999 bank sellers of 191 financial services teams	X								-	The potency of the team has a positive effect on the subjective performance

													assessed by the manager.
Verbeke, Dietz and Verwaal (2011)	Individual	Meta-analysis	268 studies					X				Adaptive selling has a positive influence on sales performance.	-
Chakrabarty et al. (2014)	Individual	Multiple regression	324 sellers of insurance agencies					X				Adaptive selling has a positive impact on sales performance.	-
Monteiro and Vieira (2016)	Individual	Regression and mediation analysis with Bootstrapping	290 sellers of water filters and filter elements divided into 101 teams	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		Potency has a direct and indirect effect on individual sales performance. The indirect effect occurs through self-efficacy and adaptive selling in parallel.	-
<b>This study</b>	<b>Individual and group</b>	<b>Regression and mediation analysis with Bootstrapping</b>	<b>100 bank sellers</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Self-efficacy and adaptive selling are serial mediators of the relationship between potency and both performances in parallel. In addition, there is an indirect series effect of team potency on individual and team performance, which goes through self-efficacy and adaptive selling.</b>	

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### Team Potency

Over the years, organizations have turned their attention to the sales teams. The growing emphasis on the sales team is justified by the possibility of creating a potency or synergy between individuals that impacts the outcome (Gully et al., 2002). The potency of the team is based on the Team Effectiveness Theory (Rubin, Plovnick & Fry, 1978), considering that the team has a common goal and to reach it establishes individual roles, defines processes and implements interpersonal relationships (Rubin et al., 1978).

The Team Effectiveness Theory provides a basis for structuring the team potency as the antecedent of performance. Gully et al. (2002, p. 820) define "potency as a widespread belief in the team's ability to act in any task and in any context". Team potency is a group-level element that elucidates a strong belief shared by members about the group's ability to successfully perform tasks (Jong et al., 2005) and to achieve objectives and processes (Hu & Liden, 2011).

Ahearne, Mackenzie, Podsakoff, Mathieu and Lam (2010) argue that the team potency increases the behavior of help among the group members, and improves the sales effort of the team, which as a consequence generates team performance. In addition, Lester, Meglino and Korsgaard (2002) also found that team potency improves group satisfaction and effort, suggesting that initial team performance influences potency changes over time.

Despite the positive results of team potency in performance, Stajkovic et al. (2009) observed that the impact of potency on team performance has a greater effect indirectly through team efficacy, suggesting that more specific variables can mediate this relationship. Following this suggestion, two mechanisms may help to understand the indirect effect of potency on performance. First, we use the seller's self-efficacy rather than the team's efficacy. This line of reasoning is congruent with Stajkovic et al. (2009). Second, we use adaptive selling as a way to shape the behavior of the seller. We have implemented these two mechanisms based on the Cognitive Social Theory and developed the arguments for a serial mediation effect.

### Self-efficacy

The Cognitive Social Theory suggests that the individual learns observing the task and increases his belief in the actions, developing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is the power to believe in what the individual can accomplish by determining their behavior (Maddux, 2000; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). The principle of this theory is that individuals are more likely to engage in activities that they have high levels

of self-efficacy (Van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002).

Bandura (1977) suggests that the Self-efficacy Theory is structured on the basis of diverse sources of information that are transferred and mediated by the experience of the individual, since the unique things experienced influence the perception that each has of him/herself. According to Bandura (2011), the main sources of self-efficacy are the experience of situations of success and failure, and the observation of others persevering in situations of difficulty and persuasion, both received externally and internally.

Fu et al. (2010) clarify that self-efficacy is important for the formation of sales purpose. Troster, Mehra and Knippenbe (2014) complement that individuals with the same abilities may perform differently because of their self-efficacy. The seller is expected to learn from sales failures and improve their self-efficacy in subsequent activity, persevering in customer service.

Self-efficacy is related to sales performance (Brown, Jones, & Leigh, 2005; Fu et al., 2010) because individuals with high self-efficacy tend to perform necessary tasks to achieve the desired goals (Brown et al., 2005). In addition, self-efficacy helps the development of other skills in salespeople because it interferes in the quality of cognitive, motivational, affective and decision-making processes of individuals (Bandura, 2011).

Some studies clarify the difference between self-efficacy and potency. Self-efficacy refers to the individual's belief in his/her ability to perform a specific task (Maddux, 2000). Potency has a broader meaning and encompasses general beliefs about the team's ability to act in any context and in any task (Gully et al., 2002), and is therefore a distinct and more comprehensive concept than self-efficacy (Jong et al., 2005).

The Self-Efficacy Theory is based on the individual's belief that he/she can have an outcome (Bandura, 1977; 2011), exploring how beliefs about ability affect motivation (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura (1977), people tend to behave when they assert belief in efficacy. One possible behavior is adaptive selling. Therefore, in order to achieve a desired result, salespeople employ their beliefs in the realization of adaptive behavior, which sequentially influences expectations of results, increasing performance.

### Adaptive selling

Personal selling happens in a dynamic and interactive process between the seller and the customer. In this interaction, adaptability is an important competence for salespeople to be successful in sales activities (Weitz, Sujaan, & Sujaan, 1986). By observing clients, obtaining information, developing solutions, communicating, among other things, sellers can



improve the interaction to the needs of each customer (Chen & Jaramillo, 2014). Thus, adaptive selling represents the vendor's ability to adapt to characteristics, behaviors, conditions and adversities at the time of sale (Chakrabarty, Widding, & Brown, 2014; Franke & Park, 2006; Mcfarland, Challagalla, Shervani, 2006).

Adaptive selling "indicates the degree to which sellers are able to take advantage of unique elements of communication associated with personal selling" (Weitz et al., 1986, p. 174). For Román and Iacobucci (2010), through adaptive selling, sellers are able to develop exclusive messages for each client, being a means of communication with the potential to work better than the others.

In order to achieve adaptive selling, sellers must be able to observe the behaviors and reactions of different customers and make quick adjustments according to each buyer profile, changing their behavior when necessary (Mcfarland et al., 2006; Román & Iacobucci, 2010 Spiro & Weitz, 1990).

The adaptive selling has a positive influence on sales performance (Chakrabarty et al., 2014; Roman & Iacobucci, 2010; Verbeke, Dietz, & Verwaal, 2011) and can be influenced by the use and regulation of emotions (Chakrabarty et al., 2014; Chen & Jaramillo, 2014; Locander, Mulki, & Weinberg, 2014). Román and Iacobucci (2010) clarify that confidence in adaptive selling increases the adaptive behavior of sellers, increasing performance. Moreover, Verbeke et al. (2011) identify, among several sales performance antecedents, the adaptive selling as one of the main behaviors that impact it. In this work we propose that this influence happens in two levels of performance, individual and team.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

Figure 1 presents the theoretical model proposed in this research. In the model, the direct and

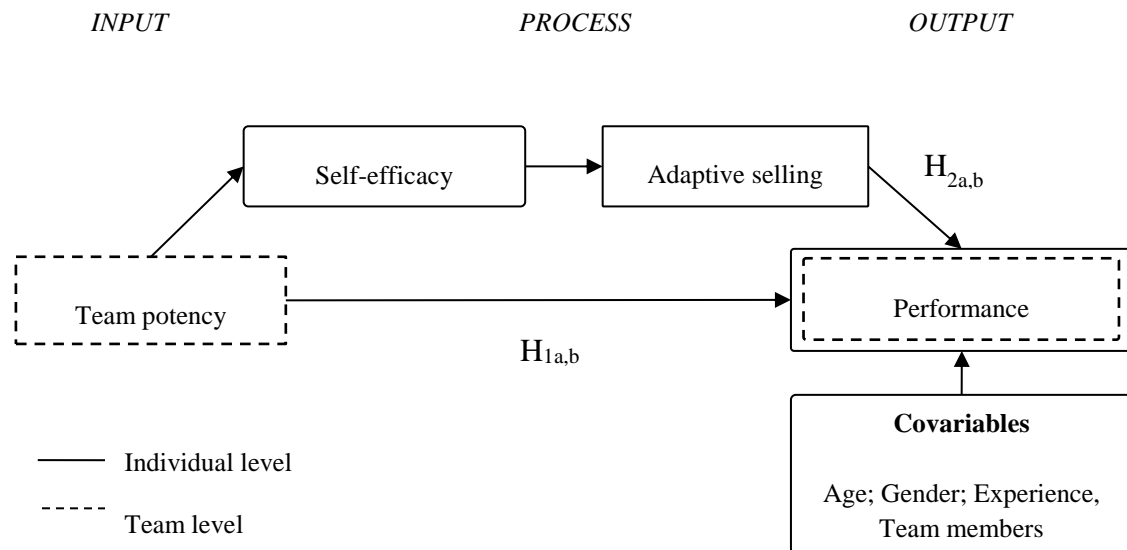
indirect effects of team potency on the sales and team performance are suggested. In the model the covariates used to control the effects were age, gender, seller's experience and number of team members.

To explore the implications of potency on individual and team performance, we use the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model, which is the dominant model when looking at teams (Barrick, Stewart, Neubert & Mount, 1998). The model "portrays process variables as mechanisms that link inputs and organizational outputs" (Glaber, Rapp & Richey, 2014, p.174).

The IPO model is useful and applies to the context of our research because IPO model considers that independent variables affect certain variables of results through a process, which in the case of our research is the process of serial mediation. We understand potency as an input that achieves individual and team performance (outputs) through a process of influencing the seller's self-efficacy and adaptive selling behavior.

Inputs and outputs can be classified into three categories: (a) individual factors, which describe the perceptions or characteristics of team members; (b) factors of the group, which treat the team as a whole; (c) environmental factors, which describe the context in which the team operates (Hackman, 1987). In our case, the constructs of potency, individual and team performance are classified as individual factors, because they have been operationalized from the individual perception of each team member.

The key to the model lies in the process in which the input impacts the output (Hackman, 1987). A basic premise of the IPO model is "that input states affect performance results exclusively through their intermediate effects" (Hackman, 1987, p. 320). The premise of the IPO model is consistent with our work, which presents as thesis that the effect of potency on individual and team performance goes through the self-efficacy and adaptive selling of the sellers.



**Figure 1** – Theoretical IPO model of potency effects in performance

### DIRECT EFFECT OF POTENCY ON PERFORMANCE

In the first hypothesis, we suggested that the team potency influences both the individual and team performance, in two ways. First, Ahearne et al. (2010) clarify that the team potency increases the behavior of help in the group. We believe that team potency help will make salespeople work together, pursuing a common goal, which is to improve performance. Thus, when all salespeople work together for the same purpose, helping one another, their individual qualities can stand out, and one's weaknesses (eg. lack of information, lack of experience, anxiety) can be suppressed by the qualities of others, allowing problems to be solved (Ahearne et al., 2010). Therefore, team potency facilitates help and tends to influence individual and collective sales performance.

Second, Gully et al. (2002) argue that team potency increases group effort. This is because potency can generate a shared motivation among the group that will make you strive in pursuit of your goals. When salespeople believe in the team's ability to perform their tasks, they will spend more effort to achieve them, generating greater performance. In this way, the individual perception of group potency influences both individual and collective sales performance. Therefore:

**H1:** The perception about the potency of the team has positive effect (a) on the individual performance and (b) on the team performance.

### Serial mediation in the relationship between potency and performance

In our IPO Model, we suggested that the indirect effect of the team's potency on performance,

both individual and collective, occurs in series, being transmitted first by self-efficacy and then by adaptive selling. Three arguments are elaborated to explain the mechanisms of serial mediation.

The first argument relates to the relationship between team potency and levels of self-efficacy and adaptive selling of the sellers. As team potency is a widespread belief in the group's ability to achieve goals (Gully et al., 2002), an individual belonging to that team, who considers a high potency of the team should also believe in the individual's ability to accomplish their goals. (Gully et al., 2002; Stajkovic et al., 2009). In sequence, the potency of the team should influence the adaptive selling. Román and Iacobucci (2010) point out that to act adaptively sellers need to gain confidence in their ability to achieve their results. In this way, the salesperson who perceives the potency of his/her team as being high should gain greater confidence in performing the sales tasks and increase his/her ability to act adaptively.

The second argument refers to the relationship between self-efficacy and adaptive selling. The perception of self-efficacy is defended by Bandura (1977) as one of the characteristics that most impact on the behavior of individuals, because "the greater the self-efficacy, the greater the efforts" in goal pursuit (p.194). These efforts will be directed to the needs of each customer, making the seller adapt to each interaction (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). Thus, the self-efficacy of salespeople influences the development of their adaptive selling ability. In this sense, the more salespeople believe they can achieve their goals, the more they will use cognitive factors to determine motivation and behavior (Bandura, 2001).

The third argument refers to the relationship of self-efficacy and adaptive selling to individual and team performance. Individuals who have positive self-

efficacy direct the effort and motivation (Bandura, 2001) into the tasks necessary to achieve the desired performance levels (Brown et al., 2005). Cognitive Social Theory suggests that beliefs of self-efficacy are important aspects of motivation (Bandura, 1977, 2001, 2011), which help sellers in psychological and behavioral control so that they do not give up in the face of difficulties (Maddux 2000). Thus, self-efficacy generates resistance in difficulty, influencing individual and team performance (Brown et al., 2005; Fu et al., 2010; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

With regard to adaptive selling, Franke and Park (2006) believe that simple forms of adaptation, such as reactions to questions, comments and body language, can help in relationships with individuals. Thus, in establishing a pleasant relationship with the customer, salespeople increase the chances of selling, and thus increase individual performance (Franke & Park, 2006). In this way, adaptive selling is a sales behavior that helps sellers to act according to each situation, with each customer and with each sale objective, achieving more effective solutions and influencing individual and team performance (Spiro & Weitz, 1990, Weitz et al., 1986). Therefore, we suggested that:

**H2:** The perceived team potency has indirect and positive effect in series (a) on the individual performance and (b) on team performance, through self-efficacy and adaptive selling.

## METHODS

### Procedures

We collected data from front-line employees in the banking industry. These employees typically work in teams, seek individual and group performance, and have shared goals. Their sales originate from a wide variety of products and services offered to customers, such as insurance, loans, applications, credit cards, among others. The teams and their members seek differentiation strategies of products and services before other banks, seeking to win and maintain customers and market share. With this, the banking sector seems to be a right environment for research. Jong et al. (2005) and Román and Iacobucci (2010) also investigated these contexts for understanding the proposed relationships. For the data collection, we sent a printed questionnaire to the banks and, after authorization from the managers, delivered to the front line employees, assuring them the confidentiality of their answers.

### Sample

The final sample consists of 101 responses, of which 100 are valid, collected over a period of four

weeks. Five different banks participated in the sample (e.g. Uniprime, Banco do Brasil, Bradesco, Caixa and Sicredi). There was no difference in average for team potency ( $F(4.79) = 1.74$ ,  $p = \text{NS}$ ), team performance ( $F(4.79) = 0.47$ ,  $p = \text{NS}$ ), self-efficacy ( $F(4.79) = 0.59$ ,  $p = \text{NS}$ ) and adaptive selling ( $F(4.79) = 0.97$ ,  $p = \text{NS}$ ) for the five banks.

In total 57.4% of the employees were men. The age of the employee ranged from 19 to 66 years ( $M = 38.81$ ;  $SD = 12.47$ ) and the average experience in sales was 10.72 years ( $SD = 8.76$ ). The sales teams were formed by 2 to 60 members, with a mean of 27.41 members ( $SD = 16.38$ ,  $\text{Mode} = 30$ ,  $\text{Median} = 25$ ).

Using the Gpower 3.1 software and assuming the sample of 100 subjects,  $f^2 = 0.49$ , six predictors of performance presented in the theoretical model and an error probability  $\alpha = 0.05$ , we have the power of 0.99. This power result is based on the non-centrality of the parameter  $\lambda = 0.49$  and the critical value of  $F = 2.19$ . Therefore, the sample size in this research is adequate to achieve a high level of power and reduce the likelihood of Type II Error.

### Measures

We measured all the constructs of the research using scales already used in previous studies, which were translated into the Portuguese Language. The questions had choices of answers ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 10 = totally agree. The constructs were all measured at the individual level. The potency of the team and the performance of the team refer to the perception of the employee in relation to the group.

Team potency is defined as "a generalized belief in the team's ability to act in any task and in any context" (Gully et al., 2002, p.820). For measuring Team potency we used the five-item scale adapted from Guzzo, Yost, Campbell and Shea (1993).

Self-efficacy is defined as a "perception of individuals about their abilities to achieve desired effects in their actions" (Bandura, 1977, p.193). We use the five-item scale adapted from Jones (1986) to measure this construct.

Adaptive selling is defined as the ability to "change sales behavior during customer interaction based on perceived information" (Weitz et al., 1986, p.175). In terms of measurement, we used the Spiro and Weitz (1990) scale with three items.

Individual performance represents the individual's perception of their performance in sales of financial products and services. Team performance represents the individual's perception of team performance. We measured both variables with four questions adapted from Behrman and Perreault (1982), and then measured subjectively.

Research such as Monteiro and Vieira (2015) had already performed subjective measures of

performance in this context. For Behrman and Perreault (1982) performance self-assessments are more appropriate to ensure data confidentiality and standardization of information when multiple firms are used in the sample. In terms of covariates, we use age, gender, experience of the front-line employee of the bank and number of team members.

### Data Analysis

We performed statistical tests using the AMOS (version 20), SPSS (version 22) and PROCESS (version 2.16) to analyze the data and test the assumptions. Initially, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed with all the constructs of the model. The results are shown in Table 2.

Models	N	$\chi^2$	Gl	$\chi^2/d.f.$	P value <sup>1</sup>	CFI	GFI	TLI	RMSEA	P value <sup>2</sup>
Null Model	100	179	465	2,6	0,000	0,85	0,72	0,82	0,13	0,000
Model 1	100	94	163	1,7	0,000	0,95	0,84	0,93	0,08	0,006

**Table 2** – Results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis Models

**Grades** – Maximum Likelihood Method (ML); 1Level of significance of the chi-square test; 2Significance level of the RMSEA test.

The null model refers to the initial model. Model 1 refers to the model without item two of potency, items two and four of self-efficacy, item two of individual performance and item four of team performance. Marôco (2014) states that models to be acceptable should have CFI, GFI and TLI greater than .80 and RMSEA less than .10. Model 1 is in accordance with literature in all parameters, even in relation to  $\chi^2 / d.f.$  (Marôco, 2014).

After adjustment of the model, we verified the convergent validity (AVE) and composite reliability (CC) in all constructs. Results were within the expected parameters (Table 3). The discriminant validity was also analyzed by comparing the AVE with the square of the correlation coefficients of the constructs. All constructs presented discriminant validity.

We then performed descriptive and frequency statistical tests and correlation analysis to understand the data. Subsequently, we performed regression and mediation analyzes to test the hypotheses. Regression analysis was initially used to verify the direct relationship between model independent variables and performance.

The test of the other hypotheses was based on the analysis of mediation. In this case, we used

Bootstrap method of Preacher and Hayes (2004). This procedure is defended by Zhao, Lynch and Chen (2010) as advantageous over other methods. This method was performed using the PROCESS application (model 6) with SPSS. The Bootstrap method is a robust method, which avoids bias problems in the research, was first used to allow analysis of serial mediation, to provide the significance of mediation through the confidence interval and to be useful, especially in cases of medium and small samples, as is the case of this work, for not presenting normal assumptions (Field, 2013).

### RESULTS

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix. We found evidence for the positive relationships between potency and individual performance ( $r = .40, p < .01$ ) and team performance ( $r = .43, p < .01$ ). In addition, potency was positively correlated with self-efficacy ( $r = .45, p < .01$ ) and with adaptive selling ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ). Of the control variables, only the number of members in the team showed association with the research constructs, showing a relation with self-efficacy ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ), with the adaptive sale ( $r = .26; p < .05$ ) and with individual performance ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ).

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	1								
2. Experience	.82**	1							
3. Gender	.05	-.03	1						
4. Number of members	.57**	.43**	.05	1					
5. Team potency	.11	.09	-.04	.06	1				
6. Self-efficacy	.19	.17	.09	.36**	.45**	1			
7. Adaptive selling	.09	.09	.00	.26*	.38**	.67**	1		
8. Individual performance	.14	.16	-.04	.29**	.40**	.71**	.74**	1	

9. Team performance	.06	.11	-.05	.02	.43**	.42**	.52**	.56**	1
AVE					.78	.52	.69	.67	.87
CC					.93	.76	.87	.86	.95
Cronbach's alpha					.93	.73	.87	.86	.94
Mean					8,01	8,29	8,60	8,73	8,58
Standard-deviation					1,92	1,39	1,34	1,12	1,30

**Table 3** – Correlation matrix

**Notes** – The sample is 100 employees. The symbol of \* indicates significance at 5%, and the symbol \*\* at 1%; All other coefficients did not present significant statistical impact. AVE is the convergent validity and CC is the composite reliability (CC).

### Direct effects

Table 4 presents the results of the regression analyzes used to test the hypotheses H1a and H1b of the study. We performed three stepwise hierarchical regression models to test the influence of each construct on performance (individual and team). The first regression model contains only the covariables, to verify their impact on performance and to control changes as the other constructs are inserted into the model. In the second model was added the team potency to verify its direct effect on performance in isolation. In the third model self-efficacy and adaptive selling were inserted to observe the influences both on individual and team performance.

In terms of results, the potency of the team had a positive effect on the individual performance ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and on the team performance ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $p < .01$ ), supporting the H1a and H1b. This means that when the

salesperson believes in the ability of the team to achieve the goals, the sales result is positively influenced at the individual and team level. These findings corroborate the findings of Gully et al. (2002), Jong, Ruyter and Wetzels (2005), Stajkovic et al. (2009) and Ahearne et al. (2010), who demonstrated that team potency influences help and effort behaviors in teams. We found the unprecedented result for team level and we also extend the findings to the individual level.

The self-efficacy ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the adaptive selling ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $p < .01$ ) caused direct and positive effects on individual performance. The findings are in agreement with the literature that determines self-efficacy (Fu et al., 2010; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998) and the adaptive selling (Franke & Park, 2006, Román & Iacobucci, 2010) as performance antecedents. Regarding team performance, only the adaptive selling had a direct impact ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Constructs	Individual performance			Team performance		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	8,08	5,86	2,60	8,16	5,76	3,60
<i>Control</i>						
Age	.01	.01	-.07	.14	.13	.10
Gender	-.07	-.04	-.08	-.08	-.05	-.06
Experience	.09	.05	.10	.06	.03	.06
Number of members	.23	.22	.03	-.10	-.11	-.20
<i>Variables</i>						
Team potency (H <sub>1a</sub> ; H <sub>1b</sub> )		.43**	.08		.41**	.26*
Self-efficacy			.37**			.02
Adaptive-selling			.43**			.39**
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.22	.56	-.02	.14	.25
VIF <sup>a</sup> (Multicollinearity)	3,99	4,00	4,01	4,00	4,00	4,01
F (model)	1,74	5,45**	16,51**	0,60	3,54**	4,64**

**Table 4** – Linear regression models

**Notes** – The sample is 100 employees. The symbol of \* indicates significance less than 5%; \*\* less than 1%. All other coefficients did not present significant statistical impact. Highest VIF found in the model.

### Serial mediation

We used PROCSS to analyze the hypotheses of serial mediation (Preacher and Hayes 2004; Hayes 2013). The results provided the indirect coefficients that pass through the self-efficacy, by the adaptive sale and by both, generating a value of total direct effect, represented by Equation 1.

$$c_{total\ effect}=a_1*b_1+a_2*b_2+a_1*d_{21}*b_2+c' \quad (1)$$

In the mediation model,  $c$  is the total effect of the team potency on performance (individual and team),  $c'$  is the direct effect of team potency on individual and team performance,  $a_1b_1$  and  $a_2b_2$  are the indirect effects that pass through the mediators self-efficacy and adaptive selling, respectively, and  $a_1d_{21}b_2$  is the indirect effect in series that passes through the two mediators to arrive at the dependent variable (Hayes, 2013). The results are shown in Table 5.

Serial mediation analysis	Individual performance	Team performance
$a_1b_1$ :Potency→Self-efficacy→Performance	.10*	.01
$a_2b_2$ :Potency→Adaptive selling→Performance	.03	.03
$a_1d_{21}b_2$ :Potency→Self-efficacy→Adaptive selling →Performance ( $H_{2a}$ ; $H_{2b}$ )	.08*	.07*
Total indirect effect ( $a_1b_1+a_2b_2+a_1d_{21}b_2$ )	.20*	.11*
Direct effect ( $c'$ )	.03	.18*
Total effect( $c$ )	.23***	.29***
% mediated of total effect	87%	38%

**Table 5** – Indirect effects of serial mediation

**Notes** – The sample is 100 employees. The \* symbol indicates that the confidence interval is 95%, not containing 0 and \*\*\* indicates that  $p < .001$ . The % symbol represents the percentage of the total effect mediated by self-efficacy and adaptive selling.

We also estimated the mediation with covariates. As 17 individuals did not respond to age and/or experience, mediation was tested with 83 subjects and the result was consistent with that Table 4. The impact of team potency on individual performance was mediated by self-efficacy and adaptive selling in serie ( $a_1d_{21}b_2 = .08$ ; CI lower and upper confidence interval, respectively  $CI = .03-.15$ ), corroborating  $H_{2a}$ . This means that the potency of the team causes an indirect effect on the individual performance provided by self-efficacy and adaptive selling, respectively.

The total indirect impact, which considers the sum of the effects that pass through the self-efficacy and the adaptive selling, was significant ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $CI = .10-.35$ ), representing 87% of mediation of the total team potency effect in individual performance. In this way, most of the impact that the tem potency causes on individual performance is transmitted indirectly through self-efficacy and adaptive selling.

The findings show that the perception of the team potency by the seller causes the self-efficacy to increase ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When the salesperson believes that his/her team is able to achieve their goals, that trust is brought to the individual level (self-

efficacy). Therefore, the seller who relies on his/her skills and abilities can practice the adaptive sale ( $\beta = .60$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Thus, high perceptions of self-efficacy generally produce a greater capacity for adaptation (Maddux, 2000). As a result, adaptive selling allows salespeople to adapt their behavior to each type of customer, improving performance (Spitz & Weitz, 1990; Weitz et al., 1986).

The team potency had an indirect effect on the performance of the team passing through self-efficacy and the adaptive selling ( $a_1d_{21}b_2 = .07$ ;  $CI = .03 - .16$ ), corroborating  $H_{2b}$ . This result shows that the potency of the team indirectly influences team performance and individual performance. The total indirect effect was also significant ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $CI = .05 - .20$ ), indicating that 38% of the effect that the potency causes on team performance is indirect.

Team potency influences individuals' self-efficacy because it is a necessary step toward achieving desired sales goals. Consequently, more effort is expended in performing tasks (Ahearne et al., 2010). With high confidence, the seller tends to adapt (Román and Iacobucci, 2010), positively impacting the individual and team performance.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed the effects of the team potency on performance, both directly and indirectly, through self-efficacy and adaptive selling. Our IPO model is based on the Team Effectiveness Theory (Rubin, Plovnick & Fry, 1978) and Cognitive Social Theory (Bandura, 1977, 2011, Maddux, 2000). This paper presents an advance in the literature when relating team constructs with individual elements to obtain individual and team performance. We can conclude that the individual (seller) is affected by the perception that he/she has about the team and, at the same time, the performance of the team is affected by the individual belief and the behavior of adaptation of the seller, forming a positive cycle for the seller, the team and the company, in agreement with Lester et al. (2002).

## Theoretical Implications

This research presents at least four contributions to the sales performance and work in teams. First, most of the studies found investigate the team potency with collective efficacy (eg, Gully et al., 2010; Gully et al., 2002) or investigate direct impacts (eg, Gully et al. & Sosik, 2003). In this paper, we relate the team potency with self-efficacy, finding results that increase the explanatory power of the team potency at the individual level of sales. In addition, unlike most of the studies analyzed (e.g. Gully et al., 2002; Jong et al., 2005; Román & Iacobucci, 2010), we investigate the team potency related to individual and collective results. In this way, we contribute to the Theory of Team Potency (Ahearne et al., 2010; Gully et al., 2002) and Time Effectiveness Theory (Rubin et al., 1978), by increasing the explanatory power of team potency in determining sales performance.

Second, in using potency and self-efficacy, this work advances in Cognitive Social Theory (Bandura, 2011, Maddux, 2000) for demonstrating how both variables relate in the sales context, since team potency increased sales self-efficacy. In this sense, in examining a serial mediation of self-efficacy and adaptive selling, we contribute to the literature (Ahearne et al., 2010; Gully et al., 2002), showing the sequence that the relation between potency and performance occurs, since with the perception of potency, the salesperson has his/her perception of high self-efficacy, generating sufficient motivation to influence his/her sales behavior, influencing both individual and team performance.

Third, this paper contributes by finding the relationship between self-efficacy and adaptive selling. This relationship has so far been theoretically suggested by other authors, but without empirical evidence (eg. Bandura, 2011, Maddux, 2000, Spiro & Weitz, 1990).

One of the premises of the Cognitive Social Theory is that people respond in a cognitive and behavioral way to the events that happen in the environment (Maddux, 2000), generating self-efficacy. Consequently, the perception of self-efficacy determines the behavioral adaptation (Bandura, 2011). Therefore, the relationship between self-efficacy and adaptive selling is so consistent that it allows the potency effect to occurs indirectly to performance.

Fourth, in establishing the adaptive selling as mediator of the relationship between team potency and performance, this study advances in the theory of adaptive selling by positioning it as an indirect effects transmitting mechanism. According to Weitz et al. (1986), the adaptive selling practice mediates the relationship between seller characteristics, such as knowledge and information acquisition skills, and performance. Borg and Johnston (2013) proposed that adaptive selling also mediates the relationship between interpersonal skills and performance in the sales process. This study not only has shown the mediating ability of adaptive selling in the relationship between the salesperson's cognitive abilities and sales performance, but also their combination with self-efficacy, broadening the studies of Weitz et al. (1986) and Borg and Johnston (2013).

## Management Implications

The results of this study may contribute to the practice of sales. A first implication is that agency managers can seek the development of synergy and joint work in salespeople. For example, Ahearne et al. (2010) found that potency can be impacted by the attitude of empowerment. This means that bank managers can increase the flexibility and participation of the team's employees in decision making, making the group's potency increase.

Another implication for developing the perception of team potency is to enter new salespeople into senior teams that perform well. These new salespeople will believe in the potency of the team, which will therefore increase their self-efficacy, adaptability and results. On the other hand, in a lower potency team, an interesting strategy would be to insert one or more members who have a high self-efficacy, causing this belief to spread throughout the team. These strategies can be allied to the establishment of collective goals, beyond the individual goals, where the new teams will work for the individual and the collective.

A third managerial implication concerns the sellers' consensus about the potency of their team. As found by Jong et al. (2005), the team consensus increases the effect of its potency. With that in mind, managers should be concerned about cohesion among team members to see if all salespeople realize the

potential of their team in the same way. With the same insight into team potency, salespeople better understand the team's abilities, increasing their sense of belonging in the group. Feeling embedded in the group and knowing what it expects, the sellers' confidence level about their ability increases, positively impacting their self-efficacy and adaptive behavior

### Limitations

As a limitation, we consider subjective performance measurement. Ahearne et al. (2010), for example, have obtained objective data from company records to measure team performance, such as company turnover or daily sales. Data such as commissions received, objective indicators of goals established and achieved, among others could be adopted as objective measures of performance. However, it is still common to use subjective measures to measure skills and performance (Chakrabarty et al., 2014).

Another limitation can be considered by data collection to have been performed only from a data source, sellers. Data from managers evaluating their sellers or customers evaluating the performance of salespeople could enrich the search, generating a multilevel investigation.

### Future research

The present research found a mediation of greater magnitude for the individual level than for the level of the team. The use of mediators at the individual level may have influenced the outcome. Thus, further research might consider collective efficacy for a new analysis of serial mediation. Therefore, future research using mediator elements at the team level can be an interesting way of comparison.

Future research could also add team consensus as a moderating variable between the potency ratio and self-efficacy. This reasoning is based on Jong et al. (2005), who supported the idea of the consensus on the team potency as a moderating condition of the relationship between team potency and group performance. Thus, it would be feasible to insert the consensus in the theoretical IPO model proposed by the present research, with the possibility of amplifying the effects on the relations of this study.

In addition, new research can examine the moderating role that cultural diversity and the size of the team have on mediation found in this paper. Troster et al. (2014) have identified that cultural diversity among team members moderates the relationship between team size and potency. For them when the team is small, a low cultural diversity favors the potency of the team, but when the size of the team is higher, a high cultural diversity among the members favors the potency of the team. Thus, we can be

assumed that these variables would interfere with the IPO model proposed here.

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