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Pressure Selling or Customer Oriented Selling: Does Type
A Behaviour Pattern in Salespeople Affect
Their Selling Style?

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ABSTRACT

The current study empirically investigated the effect of type A behaviour pattern on their tendency for salespeople to use either pressure selling, or customer oriented selling. The indirect effect of two sources of Type A behaviour were considered. Firstly, dispositional characteristics in salespeople that seemed to elicit type A behaviour were considered. Secondly the effect of role overload on eliciting type A behaviours from type B salespeople were also considered. The data was analysed with structural equation modelling. Hierarchical regression was used to test for interactions. It was found that both dispositional and stress-related type A behaviours indirectly affected the selling style used by salespeople. Firstly, it was found that dispositional and stress-related aspects of type A behaviour could increase the tendency for salespeople to become depressed. Depression tended to decrease the tendency for salespeople to use customer oriented selling, and increase the tendency for salespeople to use pressure selling. Secondly, although both dispositional and stress related aspects of type A increased the tendency for salespeople to become impatient, only partial support was found for the effect of impatience on increasing pressure selling in salespeople. Thirdly, the "motivated achieving" aspect of type A behaviour tended to increase the likelihood that salespeople would use customer oriented selling, and reduced their tendency to become depressed. No support was found for an interaction between the dispositional and stress-related aspects of type A behaviour in salespeople. The implications of these results were discussed. Recommendations were made for interventions that may reduce the effect of antecedent variables on dysfunctional aspects of type A behaviour pattern in salespeople.

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE CURRENT STUDY

Recent Trends in Sales

Over recent years there has been a move away from sales-oriented strategies that have focused on short-term sales volume, to customer-oriented strategies that focus on building long-term relationships with customers (e.g. Dwyer, Schurr, & Sejo Oh, 1987; Ganesan, 1994; Levitt, 1983; Manohar & Narayandus, 1995; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sengupta, Krapfiel & Pusuteri, 1997; Wathne, Biong, & Hiede, 2001; Wilson, 2000). According to Levitt (1983) sales transactions often occur as a stream rather than as discrete events, therefore, organisations should seek to build relationships with customers to capitalise on the ongoing stream of transactions.

Type A Behaviour and Salespeople

Focus of the Current Study

The current study will aim to investigate how type A behaviour in salespeople may affect the ability of salespeople to build long-term relationships with their customers. It seems intuitively likely that the hard driving, impatient aspects of type A behaviour (e.g. Matthews, 1982) may result in salespeople exerting pressure when selling to customers. It also seems intuitively likely that this pressure may undermine relationships with customers (Bauer, Baunchalk, Ingram, & La Forge, 1998; Jolson, 1997)

Area of the Current Study

The current study investigates a relatively new area of research. Firstly, there does not appear to be any published literature that has considered the effect of type A behaviour in salespeople on their relationships with customers. Secondly, the predominate focus

on type A behaviour pattern (TABP) and its posited relationship with CHD has meant that type A research into areas of interest to the current study tend to have been investigated in less depth.

Theoretical Basis for the Current Study

The current study will draw on a wide body of theory and empirical research to develop a specific theory to predict the likely effect of TABP in salespeople on their ability to build relationships with clients through customer oriented selling. This study will investigate, firstly, the increasing focus on building relationships with customers rather than using sales oriented approaches such as pressure selling, and secondly, the aspects of TABP likely to increase the tendency for salespeople to use pressure selling with their customers.

Analysis Methods in the Current Study

Structural Model

The current study will aim to develop a structural equation model to evaluate the theory to be developed. This model will have a number of paths. Each path will represent a specific hypothesis. By necessity, then, there will be a reasonably large number of hypotheses to test in this study.

Hierarchical Regression

Hierarchical regression will be used to test for interactions in the current study.

Objectives for the Current Study

Providing new directions for future research

This study is cross sectional in nature and depends entirely on the use of self-report surveys. Therefore, the current study is limited in a number of ways that will be discussed later. Because of these limitations, conclusions that can be drawn from this study will be considered tentative. However, it is hoped that this study will provide new directions for research by raising questions that could be investigated by future researchers.

Practical Implications

It is anticipated that the current research will provide some useful recommendations for managers. This study may provide guidance to help managers make better decisions in a number of areas. For instance, the current study may provide information to assist managers in employing sales staff, and deploying them in the most effective manner to build relationships with customers. Also, the current study may assist managers by suggesting how variables external to salespeople such as work environments, control systems, and organisational cultures and values (e.g. Bennett, Lehman, & Forst, 1999; Flaherty, Dalstrom, & Skinner, 1999; Joshi & Randall, 2001; Kelly, 1992) are likely to relate to type A behaviour in salespeople and their ability to build relationships with customers.

SALES ORIENTED AND CUSTOMER ORIENTED SELLING

Sales Oriented Selling

Sales Oriented Selling defined

At its extreme, the sales oriented approach to selling tends to be transactional in nature. Its focus is often on short-term maximisation of sales volumes and profits (Bauer, et al., 1998; Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Ganeson, 1994; Kotler & Armstrong, 1993; Weitz & Saxe; 1982). In sales-oriented selling, salespeople tend to promote product features and benefits, and aim to persuade customers into purchasing their offerings. The sales-oriented approach is based on the assumption that customers can be convinced that a given product will best satisfy their needs. (Bauer, et al. 1998; Bell, 1993; Kotler & Armstrong, 1993; Saxe & Weitz, 1982).

Problems with Sales Oriented Selling

Sales oriented strategies that previously dominated selling have been criticised over recent years. A major criticism (e.g. Bauer, et al., 1998; Jolson, 1997; Saxe & Weitz, 1983) has been that sales oriented strategies can tend to lead to pressure selling, exaggeration, and dishonesty in salespeople with customers. Pressure selling can tend to undermine relationships with customers in several ways:

Restricting information flow from customers

Salespeople who use pressure selling to dominate customers can restrict information flow from customers. By restricting information flow, salespeople may not fully understand customer needs, and therefore may be less likely to satisfy their needs (Jolson, 1997; Soldow & Thomas, 1984; Weitz & Bradford, 1999). Rather than understanding customer needs it has been argued (Bauer et al., 1998; Bell, 1993; Jolson, 1997; Rackman, 1988) that the goal in sales oriented strategies is often to pitch the product; convince, or pressure customers to purchase, and; close the sale as quickly as

possible before the customer has an opportunity to purchase from another seller. Consequently, if sales oriented strategies decrease the likelihood that customer' needs are fully understood, then needs may not be accurately met, and customers may be dissatisfied with the outcome. Dissatisfied customers seem less likely to seek future interactions with salespeople who have been the source of the dissatisfaction (Bauer, et al., 1998; Jolson, 1997).

Undermining customer trust

The sales oriented approach to selling has also been criticised by proponents of relationship selling because this style of selling may undermine customer trust for salespeople. It has been argued (Crosby et al. 1990; Ganeson, 1994; Jolson, 1997; Keillor, Parker, & Pettijohn, 1999; Rackman, 1988) that the pressure, exaggeration, and dishonesty thought to be associated with sales oriented selling can undermine customer trust in salespeople. Firstly, customers who feel pressured into a sale may not believe that the salesperson has their best interests in mind. Secondly, exaggeration and dishonesty from a salesperson can lead the customer to doubt the credibility of the salesperson.

Advantages of Sales Oriented Selling

Despite these criticisms, it has been argued that there are a number of advantages to the sales oriented approach to selling. Firstly, some customers prefer salespeople to use sales oriented methods (Bauer et al., 1998). Secondly, sales oriented strategies may be more successful; for sales that are low in value; where the risk in the sale is low for the customer; if it is unlikely that there will be an ongoing relationship between the customer and the salesperson after the sale, or; if the transaction can be completed in one interaction (Bauer, et al., 1998; Crosby et al., 1990; Keillor, et al., 1999; Kelly, 1992; Weitz & Saxe, 1982). Thirdly, sales oriented strategies are likely to be less risky in that they require less initial investment and are likely to have higher short-term results than relationship selling approaches (Joshi & Randall, 2001).

Customer Oriented Selling

Customer Oriented Selling Defined

According to Saxe & Weitz (1982), customer orientation is the marketing concept being applied in the selling context. Customer oriented selling focuses on understanding customer needs as accurately as possible, and meeting those needs as accurately as possible.

Conditions Required for Customer Oriented Selling

Customer oriented selling strategies focus on eliciting information from customers so their needs can be clearly understood by the salesperson (Lambert, Marmorstein & Sharma, 1990; Saxe & Weitz, 1982). Rather than dominating dyadic exchanges, the customer oriented approach recommends that salespeople should maintain equality in the relationship so that information can flow freely from both sides (Comstock & Higgins; 1997; Franwick, Porter, & Crosby, 2001; Jolson, 1997; Soldow & Thomas, 1984; Weitz & Bradford, 1999). Furthermore, salespeople should focus on building trust with customers so that salespeople are perceived by the customer as credible, dependable, and genuinely concerned for their needs (Barnes, 1981; Doyle & Roth, 1992; Dwyer et al. 1987; Ganesan,1994; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Levitt, 1983; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Shirdeshmakh, Singh, & Sabel, 2002). Through gaining customer trust and satisfying their needs accurately, it is hoped that customers will desire future interactions with the salesperson, and as a consequence, become committed to a long term relationship with the salesperson (Doyle & Roth, 1992; Ganesan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Skills Required for Customer Oriented Selling

In order to be effective, customer oriented salespeople should be skilled at:

- Asking probing questions that enable the customer to share important information with the salesperson (De Cormier & Jobber, 1993; Rackman, 1988.)
- Listening empathetically to customers and demonstrating genuine concern for their problems (Castleberry, Shepherd, & Ridnour, 1999; Comer & Drollinger, 1999; Ramsey & Sohi, 1997).
- Cognitively processing information accurately so that needs are clearly understood (MacIntosh, Angling, Szymanski, & Gentry, 1992; McIntyre, Claxton, Anselmi, & Wheatley, 2000).
- Being flexible and adaptable to the customers needs and communication style (Boorom, Golsby & Ramsey, 1998; Lambert et al., 1990; Levy & Sharma 1994; Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Weitz, 1981; Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986; Williams & Spiro, 1985).
- Matching a solution to customer needs as accurately as possible (Jolson, 1997; Rackman, 1988; Saxe & Weitz, 1983).
- Avoiding opportunistic behaviour with customers that could undermine trust (Doyle & Roth, 1992; Ganesan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994)
- Demonstrating reliability and consistency in their dealings with customers (Doyle & Roth, 1992).

Implications for the Current Study

It follows that those skills mentioned in the previous paragraph are only likely to have most opportunity for use by salespeople if; the flow of information from the customer is not restricted by the salesperson (Jolson, 1997; Soldow & Thomas, 1984; Weitz & Bradford, 1999), and; there is an ongoing relationship between customers based on trust and commitment, as was mentioned earlier (Doyle & Roth, 1992; Ganesan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It follows then that any variables that restrict the flow of information from customers or undermine the customer's trust in the salesperson, may work against customer oriented selling objectives.

Advantages of Customer Oriented Selling Methods

It has been argued (e.g. Levitt, 1983; Rackman, 1988) that relationship selling methods are appropriate for products when; products are high in value or complex; sales are likely to occur as an ongoing stream of transactions, and; when customers expect various after-sales services to be provided by the salesperson. These characteristics apply to many products in many markets; for instance; the service industry; industrial markets, and; other business-to-business selling (Bauer et al. 1998; Crosby et al. 1990; Ganeson, 1994; Humphreys & Williams, 1996; Keillor et al., 1999; Kelly, 1992; Rackman, 1988).

Disadvantages with Customer Oriented Selling

However, despite the advantages that the customer oriented approach to selling seems to offer in terms of building long-term relationships with customers, there are a number of disadvantages to the customer oriented approach selling. Customer oriented strategies can be; riskier than sales-oriented selling strategies because they require a higher initial investment from organisations with no guaranteed pay-back (Joshi & Randall, 2001); less successful than the sales-oriented approach if ongoing relationships are unlikely to develop between buyer and seller (Garabino & Johnson, 1999), and; less effective than sales oriented selling strategies when the sales transaction can be completed during one interaction between salesperson and customer (Rackman, 1988).

TYPE A BEHAVIOUR PATTERN

Type A Behaviour Introduced

Type A Behaviour Pattern Defined

Type As have been described as individuals who are "aggressively involved in a chronic struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time, and if required to do so, against the opposing efforts of other things or other persons." (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974, p. 67). The major components of type A behaviour pattern (TABP) are thought to be "competitive achievement striving, a sense of time urgency and impatience, aggressiveness, and easily aroused hostility." (Booth-Kewley & Friedman, 1987, p. 343).

Type B Behaviour Defined

Type B individuals tend to be classified according to their absence of type A features. Type B individuals, therefore, are thought to be more relaxed, less achievement oriented, and less irritable than type A individuals (Siegman, 1994).

Background to Type A Behaviour Pattern

Type As have been conceptualised as hostile competitive individuals who tend to be impatient and hurried in their behaviours (e.g. Booth-Kewley & Friedman, 1987; Friedman & Rosenman, 1974; Ganster, Shaubroeck, Sime, & Mayes, 1991; Price, 1983). The main focus of research into type A behaviour pattern has been on investigating a possible causal relationship between TABP and cardiovascular heart disease (CHD) (e.g. Friedman & Rosenman, 1974; Haynes et al., 1978; Price, 1983). The focus over recent years has shifted towards anger, hostility and aggression as likely

psychological causes of CHD, and other health symptoms either in association with TABP (Birks & Roger, 2000; Booth-Kewley & Rosenmann, 1987; Karlberg, et al. 1998; Spicer, Jackson & Scragg, 1993), or independent from TABP (Barefoot et al. 1993; Gidron & Davidson, 1996; Gidron, Davidson & Bata, 1999; Siegman, 1994).

Relevance of Type A Behaviour Pattern to the Current Study

This study considers the effect of TABP on the relational behaviour of salespeople in the salesperson-customer dyad. Type A behaviour is relevant to sales because research suggests that TBAP can lead to impatience and dominance behaviour. (Glass, 1977; Lamond, Scudder, & Dickenson, 1993; Price, 1983; Stensrund, 1985; Strube, Keller, Oxenberg, & Lapidot, 1989; Wright, Newman, McCormick, & Harding, 1994; Yarnold, & Grimm, 1988; Yarnold, Mueser, & Grimm, 1985). This behaviour could work against salespeople building long-term relationships with customers (Jolson, 1997; Soldow & Thomas, 1984; Weitz & Bradford, 1999). In other words, it seems that type A behaviour may tend to be associated with pressure selling rather than customer oriented selling. It follows then that type A behaviour may be of concern to managers who wish to pursue customer oriented selling strategies in their organisations.

Previous Research into Type A Behaviour and Sales

Only a few previous studies have considered TABP in the sales setting. These studies have tended to focus on TABP in salespeople in relation to; sales performance in terms of sales volume (Bluen, Barling, & Burns, 1990; Bartkus, Peterson, & Ballenger, 1989; Lee & Gillen, 1989; Matteson, Ivancevich, & Smith, 1984; Sager, 1991); planning ability (Barling, Kelloway, & Cheung, 1996); occupational stress (Sager, 1991), and depression (Bluen et al., 1990). However, none of these studies have considered the effect that TABP in salespeople might have on relationships with customers. Consequently, previous research into TABP in salespeople is not particularly helpful for the current study.