

PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF EFFECTIVE SALES PRESENTATIONS

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Adapting a sales presentation to the preferred information intake and processing modes of the customer can greatly improve the effectiveness of sales presentations. The concept of Jungian cognitive style can provide useful guidelines to matching a presentation to the informational needs of the consumer, but has been relatively overlooked in the marketing literature. The authors of this article redress this lack of attention to cognitive style. They adapt the Sheth framework of buyer-seller interaction to incorporate cognitive style, review the cognitive style literature relative to information intake and processing, and present guidelines for improving the effectiveness of sales presentations.

INTRODUCTION

A key task in selling involves communicating product benefits which depends greatly on the ability to make effective sales presentations. Traditional wisdom has focused on the importance of building interest in the product, demonstrating the benefits to the particular customer, and conveying information necessary to make the purchase decision. However, individuals differ in what they consider information (Mokwa and Evans 1984) and in how they prefer to obtain information (Mitroff and Mitroff 1979). The successful seller must understand the likely reactions of the buyer since the buyer and seller form a dyadic relationship in which the actions of one affect and are affected by the actions of the other. This relationship between buyer and seller has received attention in a number of studies ranging from demographic similarity to adaptive selling and communication.

In this paper we present cognitive style as a possible additional determinant of the effectiveness of sales dyad relationships. This conforms with the recommendations of Morgan and Stoltman (1990), who suggested that social cognition theory would enhance understanding of the buyer-seller relationship. Further, we illustrate how cognitive style fits within Sheth's communication framework which should improve our understanding of the interactive processes of the

relationship. In the next section we review the literature relevant to adapting sales presentations. In the third section we explain the concept of cognitive style based on the writings of Carl Jung. In the fourth section we discuss how cognitive style may help explain relationships between salespeople and buyers. This fourth section develops a number of propositions using cognitive style and Sheth's (1976) communication framework. The fifth section recommends approaches that sales managers and salespeople can use this information to improve their sales effectiveness. The paper closes with some recommendations for future research.

BACKGROUND

Evans (1963) was among the first to focus attention on the dyadic nature of market interactions. His early study looked at the effects of similarity on a number of demographic variables on the relationship of life insurance salesmen and their clients. His study concluded that similarity positively effected the likelihood of making a sale. Since Evans' initial work a number of researchers have studied the effects of demographic similarity on sales performance (i.e., Gadel 1964; Churchill, Collins, and Strang 1975). Going beyond demographics, others have tested the effects of more cognitively based variables such as similarity of attitudes and perception (i.e., Brock 1965; Mathews, Wilson, and Monokky 1972; Riordan, Oliver, and Donnelly 1977). After reviewing this body of work, Weitz (1981) concluded that "dyadic similarity studies have not demonstrated a meaningful relationship between similarity and effectiveness." However, Wilson and Ginghold (1981) suggest several reasons why similarity may still prove important. For example,

similarity may prove of most importance in ongoing relationships, which have received relatively little research attention. Further, similarity may work only indirectly on effectiveness through rapport and may thus prove important in the overall interaction but not surface with most research methodologies.

While similarity of the participants on various dimensions has certainly provided an important theme throughout the personal selling literature, more recently the focus has shifted to adaptiveness or adaptive selling. Certainly within the sales dyad good salespeople have practiced adaptive selling for about as long as they have practiced selling. Effectively adjusting the sales presentation to the needs of the client forms the very basis of success in selling. Along these lines, Weitz (1979, 1981) stresses the need for a contingency approach to the selling task, tailoring the sales approach to the specific selling situation. Sujan and Weitz (1986) present some empirical support for the success of adaptive selling. However, Dubinsky and Hartley (1986) showed no relationship between a salesperson's ability to adapt (as measured by self-monitoring behavior) and job performance. On the other hand, Fine and Gardial (1990) found self-monitoring to have a moderating effect on adaptability. The tendency to attribute positive traits to similar individuals and negative traits to dissimilar individuals was greater for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors.

In keeping with the increasing focus on more cognitive-based characteristics affecting the buyer-seller dyad, Goolsby, Lagace, and Boorum (1992) tie salesperson's adaptability to psychological adaptiveness based on three measures; self-monitoring, psychological androgyny, and intrinsic reward orientation. When tested against sales performance as measured across five different dimensions they found the impact of adaptive psychological traits on sales performance significant and positive. Their development of the bases of psychological adaptiveness ties into three related theories of cognitive orientation and human behavior, namely, social learning theory, role performance theory, and impression management theory. This direction seems in line with the recommendations of Morgan and Stoltman (1990) who specifically call for the inclusion of social cognition theory in the investigation of the salesperson-customer dyad. They recommend six classes of questions for research. First, multiple focus questions concern the nature and bases of categorization schemes. Second, structure context questions address how salespeople determine the structure and importance of information. Third, triggering questions seek to identify the determinants of knowledge struc-

tures. Fourth, goodness of fit questions concern the determinants of the need to adjust the sales presentation. Fifth, maintenance/change questions deal with the conditions of assimilation of sales experience. Finally, acquisition questions focus on the role of experience and training in the acquisition of information.

Cognitive factors alone prove insufficient for understanding the customer-salesperson dyad. Williams, Spiro, and Fine (1990) propose an interactive/communication process approach to research on personal selling. Their article points out the importance of understanding interpersonal communications in the study of personal selling. They suggest areas such as communication coding, information processing, and role theory as important avenues for future research. Miles, Arnold, and Nash (1990) also note the importance of communication style on seller adaptation. They use Scanzoni's (1979) stages of buyer-seller relationships and Sheth's (1976) communication style framework to propose an interaction between the phase of the dyad's relationship and the buyer's primary communication style.

In summary, the more recent personal selling literature emphasizes the dyadic nature of the sales relationship. The above review discussed a portion of this literature beginning with the demographic similarity studies and proceeding through the adaptive selling studies, the cognition studies, and the communication studies. However, since the literature to date has largely ignored the possible influence of cognitive style on interpersonal interactions, we provide below a discussion of this construct.

COGNITIVE STYLE

The concept of cognitive style evolved from the pioneering work of Jung (1971), who claimed that many individual differences stem from the different ways in which people obtain and process information. Sensing (S) and intuition (N) are information intake functions, and refer to how people find out about the world. According to Mokwa and Evans (1984), sensors emphasize detailed, sensory input such as data and hard facts about a divisible, concrete reality. Conversely, intuitors (N) rely on imagination and conceptualization to construct holistic realities beyond the abilities of direct sensation and often accept possibilities and ideals as reality. Gould (1991) claims that sensors are practical, good with detail and numbers, and like tangible objects, while intuitives find patterns and trends in things and are quite at home with intangibles.

Thinking and feeling are decision making or information processing functions. Thinkers (T) emphasize the role of conventional, deductive logic in decision making, while feelers (F) accentuate values and conflict in decision making. Mokwa and Evans (1984) describe thinkers as seeking formal and general explanations relatively independent of human qualities and values. Thinking aspects are most evident in traditional logic and conventional science. On the other hand, they portray feeling as a process of individuation and questioning, the search for justification and human realization. Characteristics of feeling are most evident in conventional expressions of aesthetics, ethics, politics, and religion. Feelers are more able to accept and deal with ambiguity. While thinkers are objective, impersonal, and analytical, feelers are subjective, personal, and empathizing.

Combining one's preferred mode of information intake with the preferred decision-making function produces a person's cognitive style (i.e., Frisbie 1988; Holt 1975; Keen and Bronsema 1981; Mitroff 1981). The cognitive styles include sensory-thinker, intuitive-thinker, intuitive-feeler, and sensory-feeler. While the two functions composing one's cognitive style dominate one's world view, the other two functions also play a role. Table 1 illustrates some salient characteristics of the four cognitive styles.

While Jung included extroversion and introversion in his typology, the concept of cognitive style focuses only on the four functions, the core of Jung's typology. The focus on the means by which we obtain information and use that information to make decisions concentrates on issues of utmost and fundamental importance to behavioral scientists, and has been recognized as a cognitive style approach by personality researchers (Frisbie 1988).

It is very difficult to determine the true numerical representation in society of the various cognitive styles because of variations associated with education, career choice, and so forth. Since marketers are very familiar with VALS data, the following figures provide the cognitive style make-up of VALS respondents reported by McCaulley, Macdaid, and Kainz (1985).

	Sensory-Thinkers	Intuitive-Thinkers	Intuitive-Feelers	Sensory-Feelers
Males	56.3	18.4	8.7	16.6
Females	27.5	6.5	15.5	50.5
Unweighted Average	41.9	12.45	12.1	33.55

The figures presented above reveal that sensory-thinkers and sensory-feelers constitute the great majority of people in the general population. Further, they suggest that since intuitive-thinkers and intuitive-feelers are definitely a minority, they will have to adapt their presentation styles much more often than will sensory-thinkers and sensory-feelers.

COGNITIVE STYLE AND THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Sheth (1976) developed a conceptual framework to help explain the process of buyer-seller interactions. Figure 1 shows this framework adapted for our purposes. Sheth states that the success of a given buyer-seller relationship depends on two dimensions. The first dimension, communication content, represents the substantive focus of the interaction. It defines what each party seeks from the exchange. The second dimension, style of communication, reflects "the highly individualistic preferences and normative expectations of the buyer and the seller about the process of interaction itself" (Sheth 1976, p.383). It represents the focus of the buyer or of the seller during the interaction.

Sheth posits that when the content and style of communication are compatible an ideal transaction is possible. However, when either the process or the style is not compatible, communication becomes inefficient. When both are incompatible, communication becomes virtually impossible.

A knowledge of cognitive style can help a seller adapt his/her presentation to better align with the content and style-based needs of the buyer. This follows because an individual's cognitive style is a personal factor which affects his/her preferred communication style and content. The next two subsections develop a number of propositions relative to this relationship.

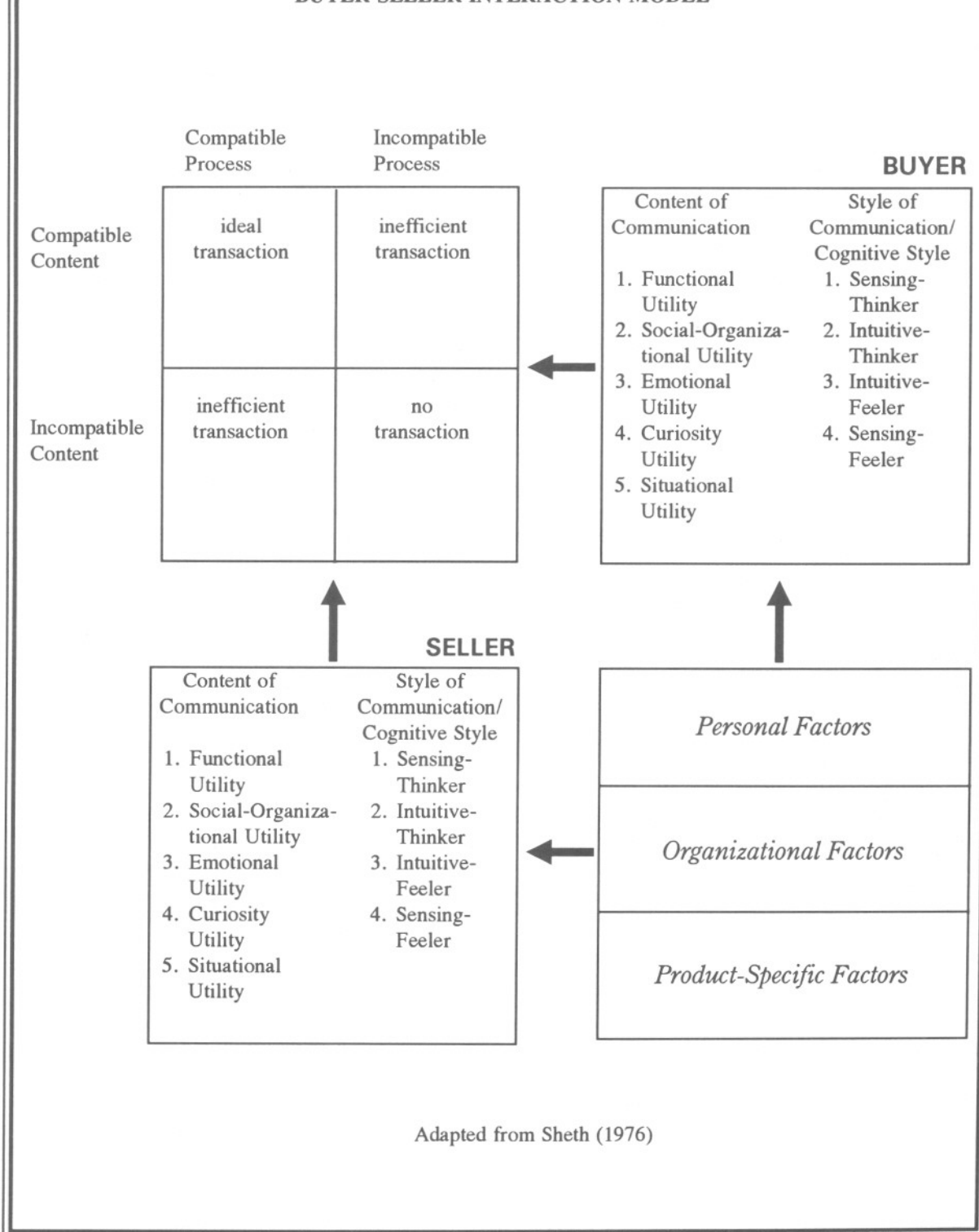
Communication Content and Cognitive Style

Sheth (1976) claims that communication content represents a set of product utilities which the seller can provide or the buyer can derive from a given situation. These five utilities include functional utility, social-organizational utility, situational utility, emotional utility, and curiosity utility. While all products may contain some degree of each of these utilities, which prove the most salient depends partly on the nature of the product itself. For example, goods usually considered prestige products would probably contain more social than emotional utility. Further, since the various cognitive styles operate from different frames of reference, it

TABLE 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COGNITIVE STYLES

Thinking	
ST (Sensory-Thinker) Seeks certainty, precision Concrete orientation Seek to find the "right" answer Detached from work Concerned with methods, techniques, procedures An impersonal perspective A technical specialist Relies on observation and Oriented toward the present Logical analysis of hard data	NT (Intuitive-Thinker) Relies on ideas and calculations Builds interesting alternatives Inventive and Imaginative Seeks to solve the puzzle Focus on alternatives and outcomes A theoretical perspective A generalist Oriented toward the future Competency important Seeks to think things through Emphasis on understanding
Sensing	Intuition
SF (Sensory-Feeler) Relies upon and seeks intense personal experience Active and experiential Seeks to get the job done Concerned with actions A behavioral perspective A pragmatist Live in present, here and now Interpersonal, subjective Focus on facts about people Culture bearer Empathizing, cooperating, personalizing	NF (Intuitive-Feeler) Relies on feelings and emotions Constructs ideal social systems Empathetic and idealistic Systemic orientation Seeks to address the real problem Concern with people's problems Focus on social impacts Takes a personal-social perspective An idealist Oriented to future Insightful, mystical See life as a seamless whole
Feeling	
Adapted from: Frisbie (1988) Hirschman (1985) Mitroff, Barabba, and Kilmann (1977)	Greig (1984) Mitroff and Kilmann (1975) Mokwa and Evans (1984)

FIGURE 1
BUYER-SELLER INTERACTION MODEL



seems likely that they would tend to emphasize different forms of utility as developed below.

Functional utility concerns a product's performance, or the objective purpose for the product's existence, how it is expected to perform. It deals with product aspects such as handling and fuel mileage for a truck, or traction and blow out protection for the tires on the truck, topics which may greatly interest sensory-thinkers. Sensory-thinkers emphasize detail and have a practical and present focus. They are objective and analytical in their approach to problem solving and tend to focus on task performance. These characteristics suggest that sensory-thinkers will emphasize functional utility.

P1: Of all the cognitive styles, sensory-thinkers will place the strongest emphasis on functional utility.

Social-organizational utility represents the social or relational benefits which one may gain from a product independent of the product's functional performance. For example, an individual may decide to purchase a particular product because owning it may enhance his/her image with a group of peers. In this case, purchase may occur even though the product does not offer a high degree of functional utility.

Various researchers describe sensory-feelers as socially oriented, amiable, oriented toward others, and valuing traditional cultural signs and symbols (i.e., Frisbie 1988; Mitroff, Barabba, and Kilmann 1977). They also tend to favor group decision making and feel comfortable with group processes. These characteristics suggest that sensory-feelers will place the most emphasis on social utility.

P2: Sensory-feelers will reveal the strongest concern for social-organizational utility.

Emotional utility stems from strong emotive feelings brought about through the association with other objects or events. Therefore, this utility springs not from the product itself but through its association with something else. For example, a buyer may purchase a particular brand of a product because the package reminds the buyer of a product he or she loved as a child.

Emotional utility seems to mesh with many feeling characteristics. Feelers tend to evaluate a given alternative in a value-based manner and perceive emotional meanings in seemingly straightforward messages (Hirsh and Kummerow 1989). Feelers also have a stronger tendency to think with their "heart" and de-

velop sentimental connections (Myers and Myers 1980). However, intuitive-feelers in particular reveal a greater tendency to see linkages and connections between different phenomena and tend to focus on the past (Osmond, Siegler, and Smoke 1977). Therefore, feelers in general, but intuitive-feelers in particular, may tend to make emotional connections with products.

P3: Intuitive-feelers will tend to develop emotional utility more frequently.

Curiosity utility concerns the value a person derives from novel or unique possessions or experiences. Individuals often seek out new and different things simply for their novelty. For example, many fads succeed just because they provide novel experiences.

The new and unique should appeal strongly to intuitives. Intuitives bore easily and constantly seek new challenges. They tend to emphasize the novel, unusual, or challenging (Hirsh and Kummerow 1989). However, intuitive-feelers may tend to meet this need for newness through making new acquaintances with other people. Given their greater tendency to focus on task and performance characteristics, intuitive-thinkers may look for novelty in ideas or products more than in people. Further, they seem to value novelty somewhat more than intuitive-feelers, occasionally seeking change for change sake (Brownsword 1988). Thus, curiosity utility should prove most salient to intuitive-thinkers.

P4: Intuitive-thinkers will place the strongest emphasis on curiosity utility.

Situational utility derives from the existence of a specific set of conditions or circumstances. For example, an umbrella exemplifies situational utility since it provides value only during rainy periods. A tax lawyer's services may provide no utility until a company undergoes an audit. Situational utility would seem to lie more within the nature of the product than in the actor, and thus may prove less sensitive to cognitive style influences. Therefore, we omit situational utility from further discussion.

Having discussed the content portion of our adaptation of Sheth's model, we now address the communication style portion.

Communication Style and Cognitive Style

Sheth (1976) identifies three communication styles that buyers and/or sellers may adopt. These include the

task-oriented style, the interaction-oriented style, and the self-oriented style.

The task-oriented style reflects a high goal orientation, a strong sense of purpose. The individual employing this style focuses on efficient performance of the task at hand so as to minimize cost, effort, and time. This individual tends to eliminate non-essential information and deal only with the "relevant" facts.

In contrast to the task-oriented style, the interaction-oriented style emphasizes the social part of the interaction. In fact, preference for this style of interaction often results in downplaying or ignoring the task at hand. An individual following this style of communication often needs to first establish a personal relationship with the other person before getting down to the specific content of the communication.

The self-oriented style reflects a person's preoccupation with him/herself in an interaction situation. The individual with this orientation views all aspects of the interaction from his own selfish point of view.

Sheth's description of the task-oriented style seems to capture the thinking function, while his description of the interaction-oriented style seems to apply to feeling. The self-oriented style does not seem to favor any particular cognitive style but rather reflects a rather immature and undifferentiated individual. However, his descriptions do not appear to utilize the information intake functions, sensing and intuition. We suggest that the cognitive styles give a richer and more complete description of communication style, and previous research by Yeakley (1982, 1983) indicates that cognitive style can help explain communication effectiveness. Therefore, we replace Sheth's three styles with the four cognitive styles in our adapted model.

Major factors related to communication style that can influence the interaction between buyer and seller include how different cognitive styles define information, the types of information they tend to address, differences in perceptions of risk, how they like information presented, how the different styles approach the decision process, and the decision models they prefer to use. The following four subsections address these facets of communication style.

Information Definition

People of different styles define information differently (Mason and Mitroff 1973). For example, thinkers regard information as a very symbolic, abstract system

or model practically devoid of empirical content. In contrast, sensors look on information as entirely empirical and nearly devoid of theoretical content. Intuitives would tend to consider imaginative stories or sketches of future possibilities as information, while for feelers information could take the form of art, poetry, human drama, or stories with a strong moral component. Further, in two marketing studies intuitive-thinkers tended to stress quantitative data while intuitive-feelers stressed subjective data (Kerin and Slocum 1981; Kerin 1983).

The key point is that what constitutes information for one style does not necessarily qualify as information for another. Thus, for effective communication sellers must learn to recognize buyers of different styles and provide buyers of each cognitive style the kind of information they need.

- P5: Communication effectiveness will improve to the extent that the information provided by the seller conforms with the cognitive style of the buyer.

Information Intake

People of different cognitive styles also differ in how they prefer to obtain information. For example, previous research by Mitroff and Mitroff (1979) has established that sensory-thinkers prefer standardized, time-proven sources of information and detailed factual data. Sensory-feelers prefer to consult a long-time trusted personal friend who knows "everyone who is anyone" in the pertinent field. Intuitive-feelers also prefer to consult a personal friend, but this friend bases recommendations entirely on his or her own judgment rather than on facts and widespread social consensus, as does the friend the sensory-feelers prefer. Finally, intuitive-thinkers prefer to rely on a global analysis by experts.

Thus, the salesperson should expect a wide variation in how people of different styles search for information. A sensory-thinker salesperson may naturally tend to supply all customers with a great deal of technical detail, since that fits with the preferences of sensory-thinkers. However, as just shown, this approach would likely go unappreciated with buyers of the other three cognitive styles, particularly with intuitive-feelers. Cognitive style training could prepare salespersons to adapt to these differences between buyers and thus improve their effectiveness.

- P6: Presentation effectiveness will improve the more the seller recommends additional

information sources compatible with a buyer's cognitive style.

- P7: Intuitives will accept printed support material providing general background and usage information, while sensors will prefer specific, factual detail.

People of different cognitive styles also prefer to obtain information through different sources. Intuitives prefer media requiring internally mediated responses, such as print. Conversely, sensors prefer short, direct contact with stimuli requiring relatively little internal processing, such as TV. Feelers, on the other hand, prefer media that appeal more to the emotions, such as TV and movies, while thinkers prefer media that appeal relatively more to the intellect, such as non-fiction print (Anast 1965). Thus, an intuitive-thinker salesperson may regard a printed brochure with objective, conceptual information as a very effective sales support tool. However, it would likely prove less effective with sensory-thinkers because it lacked technical detail, and very ineffective with sensory-feelers and intuitive-feelers because of its objective, impersonal nature.

- P8: Emotional appeals will prove more effective with feelers while intellectual appeals will prove more appealing to thinkers.

Perceptions of Risk

Purchasing any product or service usually involves some degree of risk, and previous research has shown that the cognitive styles vary in their tendency to perceive risk in a decision situation. For example, Henderson and Nutt (1980) and Nutt (1986) demonstrated that cognitive style affected the degree of risk perceived in a proposed investment by both mid-level managers and upper-level executives. The order in which the different styles perceived high risk in a project (from high to low) was sensory-thinker, intuitive-feeler, intuitive-thinker, sensory-feeler. The order of likelihood of adopting a project (from high to low) was just the reverse. Thus, customers of some styles will require more reassurance to overcome risk than will others, which places more demands on the selling task.

- P9: Presentations to sensory-thinkers and intuitive-feelers will prove more effective the more they provide risk-reducing information.

Decision Making

Blending different cognitive styles in sales interactions can also present problems since people of different styles approach problems differently. Sensory-thinkers prefer to approach clear-cut, operational, short-term problems in a value-free manner. Intuitive-thinkers prefer a value-free approach to interesting theoretical problems with an extended time horizon. Intuitive-feelers prefer a value-based approach to ill-structured problems with an indefinite time horizon. Finally, sensory-feelers prefer a value-laden approach to well-structured people-based problems with a short time frame (Mitroff and Kilmann 1975). Thus, a sensory-feeler salesperson may tend to make a structured presentation by stressing values and near-term benefits. However, such a presentation would likely miss its mark completely to an intuitive-thinker customer (the sensory-feeler's opposite), given the very different focus of intuitive-thinkers. Likewise, a sensory-thinker's natural approach would likely prove ineffective with an intuitive-feeler, the sensory-thinker's opposite.

- P10: One's natural presentation style will prove less effective the greater the difference between buyer cognitive style and seller cognitive style.

People of different styles also tend to formulate problems differently, and to seek different information sources. Intuitive-feelers and sensory-feelers tend to define problems as residing in the technical system rather than stemming from the people involved, and offer solutions which improve efficiency of that system. They also tend to resist changing their initial conceptualization in the face of opposing information. In contrast, intuitive-thinkers and sensory-thinkers tend to define problems as residing equally in the technical system and the people involved. They also tend to readily change their initial conceptualization of the problem in response to opposing information (Herden and Lyles 1981).

This could affect perception of the locus of control, as well as the ease with which buyers respond to persuasive sales presentations. Intuitive-thinker and sensory-thinker sellers may expect buyers to take a proactive stance in their problem solving and respond easily to new information the seller supplies. Conversely, intuitive-feeler and sensory-feeler buyers may perceive that the problem lies outside their control, within the greater system, and prove less proactive problem solvers. Further, they may stick with initial positions even in

the face of new information provided by the seller. Once again, the problem stems from a mismatch between the approaches of buyers and sellers different in style.

- P11: Presentations to intuitive-feeler and sensory-feeler buyers will prove more effective if they provide incentives to action.

People of different cognitive styles also seem to prefer different decision models (Nutt 1979). Sensory-thinkers prefer the Master Plan approach with its emphasis on fitting evaluative information to stock situations. This very deterministic model assumes a closed system. Intuitive-thinkers prefer either the Normative Decision Theory (NDT) model or the Behavior Decision Theory (BDT) model. The NDT assumes known goals and readily available information, while the BDT focuses on serial search for "acceptable solutions," or satisficing. On the other hand, intuitive-feelers reject the NDT and BDT approaches in favor of adaptive approaches. They focus on open-system conditions and ill-defined problems, as well as qualitative rather than quantitative methods. Finally, sensory-feelers prefer group decision making. In this approach different individuals contribute their experience and knowledge, and assume that participation will promote acceptance of the decision. Clearly, people different in cognitive style rely on very different decision models, so that using the model consistent with one's own style could prove totally ineffective with someone of another style.

- P12: Sensory-thinkers will respond best to presentations that help define and fit problems to stock solutions, such as standard operation procedures.
- P13: Presentations to intuitive-thinkers will prove most effective when they avoid a "go-no go" approach, but provide several "acceptable" alternatives.
- P14: Intuitive-feeler buyers will respond less well to structured presentations, but will favor fluid, flexible presentations that allow qualitative analysis.
- P15: Sensory-feelers will respond best to group presentations that allow them to sample opinions from others involved in the decision.

We turn now to the possible implications of incorporating cognitive style can play into the communication process.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SALES PERSONNEL

A working knowledge of cognitive style would enable salespeople to develop the ability to tailor the presentation to the style-related needs of the customer. All of the information presented in the literature should prove useful to salespeople in formulating presentations, and Table 2 distills the essence of past research regarding the presentation of information to customers of different cognitive styles.

In addition to the customary selling tasks of putting the customer at ease, qualifying the customer, and overcoming objections, the salesperson wishing to benefit from a knowledge of cognitive style must first identify the style of the customer. The face-to-face encounters inherent in direct selling greatly facilitates this style identification process since many of the style-related characteristics in Table 1 are readily apparent to the observer. Thus, a person with some training in the functions comprising cognitive style and the characteristics of each style can make a relatively accurate assessment of another's cognitive style through observation (Kroegeer and Thuesen 1988; Osmond, Siegler, and Smoke 1977; Sharp 1987).

Most people find cognitive style interesting and readily respond to such instruction. Experience can help salespeople develop statements that can facilitate the determination of a customer's style. To illustrate, after the introductory period the salesperson may state something to the effect that he or she has an interesting new product or service and prepare to make the presentation. A statement such as, "I suppose you would like a lot of facts and figures," should elicit a response indicative of the customer's style. For example, sensory-thinkers should respond relatively positively to this statement, while sensory-feelers may suggest that the salesperson focus on the human aspects. Intuitives, such as intuitive-thinkers and intuitive-feelers, would probably make some response indicating that the salesperson should just provide a broad overview and leave details for later.

Determining the cognitive style of salespeople presents little difficulty since the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers and McCaulley 1985) offers an easy and convenient instrument. It is available in self-scoring form, and over two million people took the test in 1991 (CPP 1992).

The following discussion focuses on how a knowledge of cognitive style could help salespeople adapt their presentations to the needs of their customers.

TABLE 2
GUIDELINES FOR PRESENTATIONS

ST (Sensory/Thinking)

Structure presentation in linear, step by step format
 Graphically well done
 Stress facts, numbers
 Provide precise, accurate, verifiable detail about objects
 Be objective, focus on what is now
 Stick to what's been proven or provable
 Link goals and objectives to factual evidence of product performance
 Show successful applications of principles used in design
 Reduce risk through appearing competent
 Provide cost-benefit analysis for the near term

NT (Intuitive/Thinking)

Tight structure not necessary but follow logical sequence
 Focus on big picture
 Dwell on ideas, support with generalities
 Keep presentation impersonal
 Be objective, stress what could be in future
 Challenge imagination-what's possible or imaginable
 Vague, imprecise generalities OK (but be precise with words)
 Fit the buyer's situation into global trends, overall pattern
 Point out opportunity in the principle underlying design
 Be logical and confident in an enthusiastic manner
 Focus discussion on the future
 Present cost-benefit over longer term

NF (Intuitive/Feeling)

Fit the situation into global people-oriented trends, overall pattern
 Tie overall picture to people
 Use stories, metaphor, allegory
 Stress ideas, generalities about people
 OK to be subjective, state what should be in general
 Deal with what's good-bad, valuable-worthless
 Support point with generalities about social acceptability
 Stress the opportunities your product offers to people
 Illustrate how meeting future challenges can help people
 Stress "rightness" and human values over cost-benefit

SF (Sensory/Feeling)

Structure in a linear, step by step format
 Provide lots of personal information
 OK to be subjective, state what should be in this specific situation
 Deal with what's good-bad, moral-immoral, ethical-unethical
 Provide lots of precise, accurate detail about people
 Reduce the gulf by listing facts parties agree on first
 Give successful examples of how your product has helped people
 Reduce social risk by telling buyer who else supports idea, product
 Show how it makes sense to do what's "right"

Presenting to Sensory-Thinkers

Sensory-thinkers tend to focus on objective facts, prefer more rather than less detail, and stress logical reasoning. They usually prefer to learn in a linear, step by step manner, and tend to focus on the near term. They also tend to perceive a higher degree of risk in a financial situation than any of the other styles (Henderson and Nutt 1980; Nutt 1986).

Given the information traits of sensory-thinkers depicted above, the ideal presentation to a sensory-thinker customer would build the necessary groundwork, present relevant facts and figures in a logical, step-by-step manner, and culminate with a summary of key points. Any visual aids should appeal to the senses and reflect professional preparation, and make specific points rather than broad generalizations. Specific examples of successful applications of the product in similar situations would prove especially appropriate. Realizing that sensory-thinkers are relatively risk averse and value competence, the presenter would strive to reduce the customer's perceived risk by exuding an air of authoritative expertise. The basic thrust of the presentation would focus on favorable cost-benefit tradeoffs over the relatively near term.

Presenting to Intuitive-Thinkers

Intuitive-thinkers prefer to deal much more with concepts than with facts and focus on the big picture rather than operational detail. They favor holistic learning based on objective logic and reasoning, and focus on the future rather than present reality. They are relatively tolerant of risk and ambiguity.

The ideal presentation to intuitive-thinkers would first place the customer's situation into a bigger picture, such as showing how nationwide trends impact the customer. The presentation would focus on the application of concepts and need not provide a great deal of detail. The seller should emphasize challenges and opportunities. "Slick" presentations and visual aids would prove of little value and may actually raise suspicions in the minds of intuitive-thinker customers. The seller need spend little effort minimizing perceived risk as these buyers are relatively accepting of risk, but the seller must provide sufficient information to develop an adequate cost-benefit analysis.

Presenting to Intuitive-Feelers

Intuitive-feelers gravitate to macro, encompassing ideas oriented around people in general rather than in

the specific. Holistic learners tend toward the creative and original and focus on relationships rather than on the task at hand. They respond more to human values than to cost-benefit considerations.

As with all feelers, a key to effective presentations to intuitive-feelers includes a focus on people issues, but people in the abstract rather than the particular. The quality of the presentation and any visual aids used will prove far less important to intuitive-feelers than the values and human considerations addressed. Since intuitive-feelers are holistic learners, the presentation should flow from one point to another as issues arise, with some effort to tie things all together at the conclusion. The seller should allay any perception of risk by stressing the integrity and trustworthiness of the firm.

Presenting to Sensory-Feelers

Sensory-feelers focus on the near term, prefer considerable detail about specific people or groups, and tend to make decisions based on traditional values rather than objective logic. They lean toward linear learning, and are often empathizing and nurturing. Socially risk averse, they appear to tolerate financial risk taking.

Like the other style containing sensing, sensory-thinker presentations to sensory-feelers should focus on fact and detail, but detail about people rather than things. The seller should realize the importance of establishing some relationship with the buyer since sensory-feelers value close, personal interactions rather than impersonal transactions. Presentations should move in a linear manner from point to point, focusing on other people who have successfully used the product or service. Testimonials and references should prove most useful with these buyers, since social risk and the opinions of others may play a far more important role in the buying decision than cost-benefit aspects.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the guidelines presented here are based on a reasonable extrapolation of earlier findings, they are still somewhat conjectural in nature. Several interesting areas for future research stem from these guidelines as follows.

Given the differences concerning how the various styles obtain and process information, it is unlikely that people of all four styles would prove receptive to the same types of presentations. For example, some styles may prove more tolerant of canned presentations, while

others may respond better to the "outline" approach. Thus, one stream of research could investigate style-related receptiveness to canned, outline, and free-flowing presentations.

Another potential area of investigation would focus on the value the various styles place on testimonials and references. While it seems likely that feelers would place more value on the opinions of others than thinkers, this question has not received empirical attention.

While it seems likely, given the findings of previous research, that sensors place much more attention on the sensory aspects of a presentation such as color slides and brochures, this has not been tested in a sales setting. Therefore, assessing the actual impact of visual aids on the different styles, and determining their importance relative to other facets of the presentation would also help to improve the effectiveness of sales presentations.

Finally, the whole concept of applying a knowledge of cognitive style to making effective sales presentations depends on developing an easy to learn, easy to use method of determining another's style through observation and discussion. The development of key phrases or open ended questions that elicit useful information regarding a customer's cognitive style would greatly facilitate incorporation of cognitive style into the sales process.

CONCLUSION

Past research has provided valuable and useful insight on the ways in which people of different cognitive styles

define, obtain, and use information to make decisions. However, very little of this work actually focused on sales presentations or the dyadic nature of the selling situation. Sheth's (1976) buyer-seller interaction model helps develop an understanding of the nature of the buyer-seller relationship and points to the importance of understanding one's counterpart in a sales situation. This paper adapts Sheth's model to include an individual's cognitive style as a means to operationalize a portion of this model.

The importance of understanding one's sales partner has never been more important than it is today. Constantly increasing competitive pressures, a rapidly changing and evermore global environment, and increasingly rapid changes in technology make the development of strong loyal client relationships a must if a firm wishes to remain successful. The strength of this relationship can be reinforced or destroyed at the point of contact--the buyer-seller interaction. The nature of this interaction can be greatly enhanced through an understanding of the client's personal information needs and the ability to adapt presentations to a client's preferred processing style.

As marketing focuses more on relationship development and management, understanding some of the psychological needs of clients will continue to increase in importance. The selling field will benefit from the development of a workable face-to-face style identification method, and the testing and further development of style-based guidelines for effective presentations.

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