ANTECEDENTS OF SALESPERSON ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR: THE EFFECTS OF RELATIONAL, SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS, AND EXPERIENTIAL VARIABLES

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The theoretical literature regarding adaptive behavior in selling has grown rapidly, but a void has developed in the empirical testing of the psychological and experiential antecedents of adaptive behavior. It is the purpose of this paper to begin to fill this void by examining the effects of relational, self-consciousness, and experiential variables on a salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior. The source of data for this study was the institutional food distribution/wholesaling industry. Survey data were collected and a scenario approach was utilized. The results indicate that relational, self-consciousness, and experiential variables can be used to profile salespeople that are predisposed to adapt behavior across different types of buy classes. The findings also suggest that a salesperson's predisposition may act as an antecedent to salesperson's actual behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Salesperson behavior has been widely studied in the sales management literature. The primary purpose of behavioral research has been to examine the relationship between salesperson behavior and performance. Most notable in the current literature has been the emphasis on adaptive behavior. Through the development of the Adapts scale (Spiro and Weitz 1990) research has progressed regarding the adaptation of sales presentations to various sales situations. One premise for this stream of research has been to aid salespeople to "work smarter" (Sujan, Weitz, and Sujan 1988). Working smarter has been operationalized as the practice of adaptive selling which is defined as "the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation" (Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986).

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In order to operate effectively in a dynamic selling environment, salespeople that "work smarter" need to be motivated to analyze the selling situation, select appropriate strategies, and try new approaches. While "working smarter" may be effective for the salesperson, it is not always beneficial from a cost perspective. It has been suggested that the benefits outweigh the costs when customer needs vary, the sale involves large orders, the company provides resources to aid adaptation, or when salespeople have the capability to adapt effectively (Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986). In addition, not all salespeople may possess the predisposition to "work smarter".

Spiro and Weitz (1990) indicate that salesperson predisposition to practice adaptive selling would include: a recognition that different selling approaches are needed in different sales situations; confidence in the ability to use a variety of different sales approaches; confidence in the ability to alter the sales approach during a customer interaction; a knowledge structure that facilitates the recognition of different sales situations; a collection of information about the sales situation to facilitate adaptation; and access to sales strategies appropriate for each situation (Spiro and Weitz 1990, p. 62). In addition, they suggest that two of these predispositions, knowledge structures and collection of information, are needed to practice adaptive selling effectively.

Knowledge Structures

Both declarative (i.e., attribute based information) and procedural (ie., influence techniques and sequencing of events) knowledge structures enable salespeople to rely on categories to select specific sales approaches. By structuring incoming customer data into categories, salespeople gain a better understanding of customer product and selling requirements (Szymanski 1988). The selection of an appropriate sales approach should enhance the salesperson's effectiveness and performance.

One logical point of departure from this research is an examination of how declarative knowledge differs between effective and ineffective salespeople (Szymanski 1988).

The degree to which salespeople collect and store information provides an indication of the richness of their knowledge structures. Therefore, knowledge structures should be related to the predisposition to adapt behavior. A predisposition to adapt behavior suggests that salespeople gather and organize information prior to the sales call. Previous research has indicated that it would be desirable "to determine the extent to which salespeople have the ability to distinguish between different types of buyers and corresponding buyer desires" (Brown et al. 1991).

Collection of Information

Effectiveness is also enhanced through the collection and use of information. Effective salespeople need to successfully gather pertinent information concerning customer's wants and needs, and be able to utilize that information in future sales with that customer or other customers. Fine (1992) developed the concept of contextual flexibility (Achrol, Reve, and Stern 1983) to suggest that salespeople need to adapt across a variety of selling situations. Information and strategies learned through one customer interaction may be useful in a second customer interaction. Salesperson training that focuses on developing different sales presentations for different customer categories can be developed, and this training can lead to adaptations in the salesperson's actual behavior (Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986; Grewal and Sharma 1991).

Vink and Verbeke (1993) state that the structuralist research approach assumes that salespeople possess explicit and abstract knowledge structures. They conclude that the concept of adaptive selling should be expanded to include behavioral, personal, and situational characteristics. In addition, that it is of interest to identify situations and tasks to evaluate the function of adaptive selling.

The previous review indicates that knowledge structures are an important component to our further understanding of adaptive behavior. Moreover, salespersons' abilities to collect information during and prior to the sales presentation should enhance their predisposition to adapt behavior. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to examine the impact of behavioral, personal, and situational characteristics on the salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior. More specifically, this research examines the effects of relational, self-consciousness, and experience characteristics on salespersons' predisposition to adapt behavior.

PREDISPOSITION TO ADAPT BEHAVIOR

An examination of the predisposition to adapt behavior focuses on the salesperson's planning process as he/she attempts to tailor the sales presentation to the customer's perceived needs. The planning process is one of the key determinants of sales success. Gwinner (1968) suggests that the selling situation must be analyzed based on the unique buyer-seller relationship. Salespeople may be more inclined to practice adaptive selling if they possess the knowledge to develop unique sales plans for each customer. Measurable components of the sales planning process include both sales call planning and information gathering.

Sales Call Planning

Sales call planning is defined as "the formal or informal process which includes those interrelated activities associated with a salesperson's preparation for interaction with a customer or a prospect" (Gwin 1979, p. 9). Gwin (1979) identified one factor, call preparation, that encompassed the essence of sales call planning. Call preparation focused on planning the presentation based on information obtained from internal company records.

Information Gathering

A second component of the sales planning process is called "information gathering." In the development of the Sales Call Planning scale, Gwin (1979) found that information gathering permeates sales call planning activity. The type of information gathering examined by Gwin (1979) focused on the use of company records to inform the salesperson about specific customer interactions (e.g., "In gathering information for a sales call, I reconstruct the details of the last call on the account."). A salesperson needs to gather information for various reasons such as determining the client's needs and increasing his/her knowledge of the competition. Dubinsky and Staples (1982) examined selling techniques that are used by salespeople during the pre-approach stage. Their results indicated that "well prepared" salespeople were more likely to gather information from current customers, other company salespeople, and local newspapers. Evans and Schlacter (1985) studied the use of marketing information by salespeople and sales managers. One of their results indicated that salespeople are most likely to gather information concerning the customer's and competitor's marketing strategies. Based on previous research, information gathering includes gathering information about the seller's own company, the customer, and the competition.

RELATIONAL FACTORS

Research by Macintosh et a.l (1992) suggests that relationship development is more important during sales calls that require greater information gathering prior to the interaction. Their research supported Leigh and McGraw's (1989) finding that relationship development is more important in the initial call. Relationship development is based on the ability of the salesperson to adapt his/her role to the varying needs of the customer. Two variables that may increase salespersons' likelihood to practice adaptive selling are their communication style and the degree to which they are customer oriented.

Communication Style

Personal selling exists in a dynamic environment. Previous research has suggested that salespeople need to adapt their communication strategies to meet the needs of the customer (Williams and Spiro, 1985; Weitz 1978, Miles et al. 1990). Sheth (1976) suggests that communication styles consist of three orientations: task, self, and interaction. Williams and Spiro (1985) found that these communication styles were related to sales variance. Research by Miles et al. (1990) proposed that the three styles should vary based on the relationship phase of the buyer-seller dyad and the buyer's primary communication style. In particular, it has been suggested that a mix of interaction and task orientation is most effective in the expansion and commitment phases of the relationship.

Customer Orientation

Customer oriented selling is defined as the degree to which salespeople help their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy customer needs (Saxe and Weitz 1982). The length of time the salesperson has had a relationship with the customer would affect the degree to which the planning and information gathering processes need to be structured. In long-term relationships, the salesperson may believe that planning prior to the customer interaction is less important. Similarly, a cooperative salesperson-customer relationship may suggest that less structure is required for the sales plan. Recent research suggests that high performers are interested in relationship building and poor performers are more likely to rely on the use of product attributes to sell their product (Macintosh et al. 1992).

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS FACTORS

The information gathered during the customer interaction can aid salespeople to adapt to their current and future sales presentations. Salespeople may be predisposed to gather information based on characteristics of their personality.

Previous research has suggested that self-consciousness would be useful in the study of adaptive behavior (Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan 1986).

Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975) define self-consciousness as the consistent tendency of persons to direct attention inward or outward. The three constructs of the self-consciousness trait are public self-consciousness, private self-consciousness, and social anxiety. Public self-consciousness as a general awareness of the self as a social object that has an effect on others. Lennox and Wolfe (1984) found that public self-consciousness is related to sensitivity to expressive behavior of others. Weitz, Sujan, and Sujan (1986) indicate that one psychological test conceptually related to adaptability in social situations is public self-consciousness. Public self-consciousness emphasizes the reactions of an individual to others. For example, when salespeople lack public self-consciousness they are less responsive to changes in their feelings and emotions. Being less responsive implies they would be more likely to continue their current behavior; salespeople might be "rigid" (i.e., less adaptive) in the approach they take with customers during the interaction.

Private self-consciousness is the tendency for an individual to be concerned with attending to one's inner thoughts and feelings (e.g., being alert to mood changes). When salespeople are more privately self-conscious their attention would not be focused on gathering information from the customer interaction.

Social anxiety is defined by a discomfort in the presence of others. While public and private self-consciousness can be used to study the salesperson's focus of attention, social anxiety suggests that salespeople are reacting negatively to their outward focus of attention. Research by Lennox and Wolfe (1984) found that social anxiety is related to ability to modify self-presentation.

EXPERIENCE

Salesperson experience is an important component of adaptive behavior as it pertains to the selling process. As salespeople gain experience (whether within or across customer interactions) they enhance their declarative knowledge. Spiro and Weitz (1990) utilized company experience in their development of the Adapts scale. Their results indicated that company experience was only related to self-reported performance and was not correlated to the Adapts scale. While their results suggest that salesperson experience may not affect the practice of adaptive selling, it is believed that experience may affect the development of knowledge structures that are created prior to the interaction. Therefore, salesperson experience has been incorporated into the current examination of the predisposition to adapt behavior across customer interactions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall purpose of this research was to determine whether relational, self-consciousness, and experience factors are relevant to a salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior. Each of the factors discussed above provided the basis for the specific research questions that were examined in this study. The specific questions that were examined are as follows:

1. What explanatory factors are associated with the variability in a salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior?
2. To what extent can the explanatory factors identified in question 1 predict whether a salesperson is more likely to have a predisposition to adapt behavior?
3. Can salespeople who exhibit a greater predisposition to adapt behavior be identified by the explanatory factors?

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The institutional food wholesaler industry in the United States was selected as the source of data for this study. The sampling frame came from the "Top 50" listing of *Institutional Distribution* magazine's list of institutional food distributors/wholesalers. Data were collected from sales representatives using a mail questionnaire endorsed by a letter from the CEO of each organization.

Since previous research has indicated that buyclass can impact on the practice of adaptive selling, it was decided that an examination of both modified and straight rebuy scenarios would provide a broader understanding of the predisposition to adapt behavior. The third buyclass situation, new task, was not utilized since a tautology would exist. By definition salespeople going into a new task selling situation would be expected to alter their behavior to meet the client's needs. The scenarios (see Figures 1 and 2) were examined by several sales mangers of local institutional food distributors to ensure accuracy of the description. After several iterations, the final scenario was incorporated into the questionnaire.

FIGURE 1

Modified Rebuy Scenario

Imagine a restaurant is looking for a new supplier for food products which are needed on a regular basis. You have heard that the customer has been comparing the quality, price, product performance, delivery, and guarantees of alternative suppliers. Since they are aware of your organization, you have been given the opportunity to speak with a representative of the restaurant concerning an order.

FIGURE 2

Straight Rebuy Scenario

Imagine that, for one of your current restaurant accounts, the customer needs to reorder several products that are used on a regular basis because stock levels are depleted. This customer has a great deal of buying experience. He/She purchases products from you on a continuing basis because your firm offers good delivery, prices, and terms of payment. Soon you will have the opportunity to speak with this customer concerning an order.

For the current study 465 straight rebuy and 465 modified rebuy questionnaires were mailed. The number of usable surveys returned was 132 (28.4%) for straight rebuy questionnaires and 137

(29.5%) for modified rebuy questionnaires. The items utilized in the questionnaire are presented in the Appendix.

DATA ANALYSIS

Each of the scales were initially factor analyzed (see Table 1). All of the scales functioned appropriately except for the communication strategy scale. After data reduction the scale was reduced to five items and was renamed "compatibility" to better reflect the nature of the items. As a relational variable "compatibility" measures the interest that the salesperson has in talking to and helping the customer to complete the sale and do their job well. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the scales. The reliabilities of the constructs ranged from .71 to .86. Results are presented in Table 2.

Since the purpose was to derive a linear combination of more than two independent variables that would discriminate between the previously defined groups discussed in the hypotheses, the stepwise discriminant analysis was used. The use of discriminant analysis provides for an examination of the statistical differences between the average score profiles of salespeople with a high versus a low predisposition to adapt behavior. In addition, discriminant analysis allows for an examination of the environmental factors which account for the greatest difference in the average score profiles of the groups (Hair, Anderson, and Tatham 1987). The two categories were created by classifying salespeople with a high or low predisposition to adapt behavior based on the mean (i.e., scales were summed prior to the division into two groups).

RESULTS

Prior to an examination of the research questions, the means of the independent variables were examined across both categories of high and low predisposition to adapt behavior and across both scenarios. A summary of the group means and standard deviations for each of the behavioral variables (i.e., sales call planning, competitor information gathering, company information gathering, and customer information gathering) are presented in Table 3.

For the modified rebuy scenario, salespeople with a high predisposition to adapt behavior had a significantly higher mean on interactional regarding sales call planning and competitor information gathering. Significantly lower means were found for social anxiety regarding competitor information gathering and for private self-consciousness regarding customer information gathering.

For the straight rebuy scenario, salespeople with a high predisposition to adapt behavior had a significantly higher mean on both interactional and customer oriented regarding sales call planning. Customer oriented was also higher for competitor information gathering. A significantly lower mean was found for public self-consciousness regarding customer information gathering.

The first research question, what explanatory factors are associated with the variability in a salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior, was examined using the canonical discriminant function coefficients (See Table 4). For the modified rebuy scenario, the salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior differed depending on the dependent variable; although, the interactional variable was prominent in each function, public self-consciousness was not significant in any of the functions. For the straight rebuy scenario, variability in the salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior was affected by all of the independent variables, except interactional and company sales experience.

The second research question, to what extent can the explanatory factors predict whether a salesperson is more likely to have a predisposition to adapt behavior, was assessed by examining the

TABLE 1

Results of Factor Analysis

	Factor 1	2	3	4
Behavior Variables (Dependent)				
Company Information Gathering	.84			
Customer Information Gathering	.81			
Competitor Information Gathering	.80			
Sales Call Planning	.61			
Self-Consciousness				
Private Self-Consciousness		.78		
Social Anxiety		.67		
Public Self-Consciousness		.71		
Experience				
Company		.86		
Sales			.87	
Relational				
Interactional				.88
Customer Oriented				.67

TABLE 2

Scale Reliabilities

	Cronbach's Alpha
Behavior Variables (Dependent)	
Sales Call Planning	.78
Competitor Information Gathering	.86
Company Information Gathering	.78
Customer Information Gathering	.74
Relational:	
Customer Oriented	.73
Compatibility	.77
Self Consciousness:	
Public	.71
Private	.80
Social Anxiety	.72

TABLE 3

Summary of Group Means and Standard Deviations for Modified Rebuy Scenario

	Predisposition for Sales Call Planning			
	Low		High	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational				
Interactional	6.49	.71	6.87[a]	.19
Customer Oriented	6.13	1.00	6.55	.50
Self-Consciousness				
Public Self-Consciousness	5.62	1.11	5.75	1.04
Private Self-Consciousness	3.72	1.71	3.47	1.57
Social Anxiety	2.78	1.82	3.38	1.80
Experience				
Company	3.34	3.88	4.73	4.69
Sales	10.27	8.53	12.38	8.18

	Predisposition for Competitor Information Gathering			
	Low		High	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational				
Interactional	6.54	.67	6.78[a]	.27
Customer Oriented	6.31	.73	6.60	.39
Self-Consciousness				
Public Self-Consciousness	5.55	.96	5.89	.98
Private Self-Consciousness	3.85	1.89	3.83	1.53
Social Anxiety	3.72	2.02	2.57[a]	1.58
Experience				
Company	3.14	2.65	3.36	4.16
Sales	10.35	7.61	9.85	9.24

[a] denotes significant difference between the mean values for the two groups ($p < .05$)

	Predisposition for Company Information Gathering			
	Low		High	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational				
Interactional	6.61	.50	6.66	.55
Customer Oriented	6.22	.97	6.38	.63
Self-Consciousness				
Public Self-Consciousness	5.50	1.03	5.81	1.01
Private Self-Consciousness	3.68	1.53	3.43	1.77
Social Anxiety	3.38	2.13	3.09	1.76
Experience				
Company	4.48	4.54	6.68	7.94
Sales	10.01	7.18	11.12	9.37

TABLE 3 (*continued*)

	Predisposition for Customer Information Gathering			
	Low		High	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational				
Interactional	6.59	.51	6.80	.26
Customer Oriented	6.08	.86	6.50	.49
Self-Consciousness				
Public Self-Consciousness	6.11	.68	5.83	1.21
Private Self-Consciousness	4.98	1.67	3.46[a]	1.50
Social Anxiety	4.50	1.90	3.25	1.82
Experience				
Company	4.71	4.25	3.74	3.64
Sales	10.16	7.03	11.11	8.41

[a] denotes significant difference between the mean values for the two groups ($p < .05$)

Summary of Group Means and Standard Deviations for Straight Rebuy Scenairo

	Predisposition for Sales Call Planning			
	Low		High	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational				
Interactional	6.40	.61	6.82[a]	.27
Customer Oriented	5.90	.79	6.69[a]	.60
Self-Consciousness				
Public Self-Consciousness	4.96	1.03	5.08	1.43
Private Self-Consciousness	3.02	1.59	3.69	1.74
Social Anxiety	3.24	1.45	2.47	1.33
Experience				
Company	5.56	4.73	6.70	9.38
Sales	11.43	8.97	10.90	9.54

	Predisposition for Competitor Information Gathering			
	Low		High	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational				
Interactional	6.46	.51	6.65	.36
Customer Oriented	6.07	.69	6.50[a]	.67
Self-Consciousness				
Public Self-Consciousness	4.84	1.34	5.52	1.03
Private Self-Consciousness	3.25	1.56	3.72	1.24
Social Anxiety	3.21	1.41	2.48	1.49
Experience				
Company	5.37	5.65	4.34	7.33
Sales	11.75	8.03	11.30	8.52

[a] denotes significant difference between the mean values for the two groups ($p < .05$)

TABLE 3 (*continued*)

	Predisposition for Company Information Gathering			
	Low		High	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational				
Interactional	6.45	.63	6.70	.33
Customer Oriented	5.96	.81	6.41	.74
Self-Consciousness				
Public Self-Consciousness	4.82	1.59	4.77	1.14
Private Self-Consciousness	2.76	1.30	3.50	1.81
Social Anxiety	3.07	1.46	2.52	1.38
Experience				
Company	4.59	4.70	3.69	2.92
Sales	9.67	7.43	7.67	4.39

	Predisposition for Customer Information Gathering			
	Low		High	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relational				
Interactional	6.65	.55	6.67	.41
Customer Oriented	6.06	.77	6.72	.68
Self-Consciousness				
Public Self-Consciousness	5.47	1.10	4.04[a]	1.54
Private Self-Consciousness	3.14	1.69	3.39	2.04
Social Anxiety	3.29	1.32	3.00	1.64
Experience				
Company	8.22	9.84	2.87	2.88
Sales	11.62	9.97	5.03	4.94

[a] denotes significant difference between the mean values for the two groups ($p < .05$)

TABLE 4

Significant Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients for Modified Rebuy Scenario

Dependent Variable:	Sales Call Planning (p<.05)		Explained Variance = 20.1%
Interactional		0.74784	
Customer Oriented		0.46364	
Company Experience		0.42431	
Dependent Variable:	Competitor Information Gathering (p<.05)		Explained Variance = 18.5%
Social Anxiety		0.83029	
Interactional		-0.79666	
Sales Experience		0.46372	
Dependent Variable:	Company Information Gathering (p=.26)		
Dependent Variable:	Customer Information Gathering (p<.05)		Explained Variance = 30.5%
Private Self-Consciousness		-0.85182	
Interactional		0.46804	
Customer Oriented		0.38887	

Significant Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients for Straight Rebuy Scenario

Dependent Variable:	Sales Call Planning (p<.01)		Explained Variance = 28.1%
Customer Oriented		0.95378	
Private Self-Consciousness		0.46596	
Dependent Variable:	Competitor Information Gathering (p<.05)		Explained Variance = 21.5%
Social Anxiety		-0.59445	
Private Self-Consciousness		0.53147	
Customer Oriented		0.48354	
Public Self-Consciousness		0.42466	
Dependent Variable:	Company Information Gathering (p=.10)		
Dependent Variable:	Customer Information Gathering (p<.05)		Explained Variance = 47.7%
Public Self-Consciousness		-0.95390	
Customer Oriented		0.92017	
Social Anxiety		0.47968	
Sales Experience		-0.34438	

significance of the discriminant functions and classification matrices of the discriminant analyses. For both the modified rebuy and straight rebuy scenarios the discriminant functions for sales call planning, competitor information gathering, and customer information gathering were found to be significant at the .05 level. The discriminant function for company information gathering was not found to be significant. In addition, the percentage of variance explained by the model ranged from 18.5% to 47.7% (see Table 4).

The third research question, can salespeople who exhibit a greater predisposition to adapt behavior be identified by the explanatory factors, was examined utilizing the classification matrices, a comparison of the hit ratios for the hold-out samples to the proportional hit ratio and the maximum chance criterions were examined (see Table 5). As indicated, the hit ratios for the hold-out samples were all greater than both the proportional and maximum chance criteria, except for predisposition to gather customer information during a straight rebuy. The discriminant functions correctly classify between 57.63 per cent to 73.91 per cent of the hold-out samples.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether relational, self-consciousness, and experience factors are relevant to a salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior. The results of the discriminant analyses not only support the relevance of these factors, but also allow for profiling the salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior. Utilizing the significant variables identified in Table 4, the discriminant loadings (i.e., loadings greater than or equal to .30) provided in Table 6, and the group centroids in Table 7, a profile of the predisposition to adapt behavior variables was undertaken resulting in six profiles (i.e., predisposition to adapt behavior by buyclass scenario).

1. Modified rebuy buyclass and predisposition to conduct sales call planning:

   As would be expected this behavior is highly correlated with being more interactional and customer oriented, it was also found that in this situation salespeople possess greater company experience and social anxiety.

2. Modified rebuy buyclass and predisposition to gather competitor information:

   In order to interpret these findings it is important to examine the group centroids in Table 7. It is interesting that for only this situation and behavior combination is the group centroid negative for the predisposition to adapt behavior. When this finding is taken into account, the profile suggests that salespeople with a predisposition to gather competitor information are affected most by the negative relationship with social anxiety. In addition, a positive correlation for interactional was found and, to a lesser extent, sales experience. While the correlation was only .06, it was a significant variable in the discriminant function.

3. Modified rebuy buyclass and predisposition to gather customer information:

   This behavior had a high negative correlation with private self-consciousness and, to a lesser degree, social anxiety. It was positively correlated with being interactional and customer oriented.

While it might be expected that salespeople would be more interactional and customer oriented in a modified rebuy situation, the varying effects of self-consciousness can provide insight into the salespersons' predisposition to adapt behavior. Both social anxiety and private self-consciousness hinder the salesperson's actions, and in turn may impact on their practice of adaptive selling.

TABLE 5

Summary of Classification Matrices for Modified Rebuy Scenario

	Sales Call Planning	Competitor Information Gathering	Customer Information Gathering
Hit Ratio for Analysis Sample	72.09%	69.57%	81.82%
Hit Ratio for Hold-out Sample	73.91%	59.52%	57.63%
Proportional Chance Criterion	50.51%	50.23%	50.85%
Maximum ChanceCriterion	55.06%	52.81%	56.52%

Summary of Classification Matrices for Straight Rebuy Scenario

	Sales Call Planning	Competitor Information Gathering	Customer Information Gathering
Hit Ratio for Analysis Sample	75.68%	67.35%	86.96%
Hit Ratio for Hold-out Sample	63.16%	62.96%	58.82%
Proportional Chance Criterion	51.50%	50.14%	52.96%
Maximum Chance Criterion	58.67%	52.63%	62.16%

TABLE 6

Correlations Between Discriminating Variables and Canonical Discriminant Functions for Modified Rebuy Scenario

	Sales Call Planning	Competitor Information Gathering	Customer Information Gathering
Relational			
Interactional	0.80664	-0.51885	0.39211
Customer Oriented	0.56026	-0.24648	0.46253
Self-Consciousness			
Public Self-Cons.	0.03700	-0.06444	-0.07729
Private Self-Cons.	0.12475	0.21310	-0.74735
Social Anxiety	0.30639	0.67064	-0.32456
Experience			
Company	0.32288	-0.00274	-0.06285
Sales	0.29232	0.06431	0.22967

TABLE 6 (*continued*)
Correlations Between Discriminating Variables and Canonical Discriminant Functions for Straight Rebuy Scenario

	Sales Call Planning	Competitor Information Gathering	Customer Information Gathering
Self-Consciousness			
Public Self-Cons.	0.32480	0.55307	-0.56345
Private Self-Cons.	0.32989	0.32691	-0.13836
Social Anxiety	-0.20947	-0.49054	-0.10066
Experience			
Company	0.03826	0.10037	-0.37616
Sales	0.24417	0.22428	-0.35102
Relational			
Interactional	0.37281	0.25880	0.10986
Customer Oriented	0.88730	0.61998	0.42376

TABLE 7

Group Centroids for Non-adaptors and Adaptors for Modified Rebuy Scenario

	Sales Call Planning	Competitor Information Gathering	Customer Information Gathering
Non-Adaptors	-0.57636	0.42677	-0.64176
Adaptors	0.41498	-0.50806	0.64176

Group Centroids for Non-adaptors and Adaptors for Straight Rebuy Scenario

	Sales Call Planning	Competitor Information Gathering	Customer Information Gathering
Non-Adaptors	-0.51370	-0.51261	-0.54200
Adaptors	0.71919	0.51261	1.53568

4. Straight rebuy buyclass and predisposition to conduct sales call planning:

   This behavior was positively correlated with being customer oriented, interactional, privately self-conscious, and publicly self-conscious.
5. Straight rebuy buyclass and predisposition to gather competitor information:

   While being customer oriented had the highest correlation, all three of the self-consciousness variables affected this behavior. The correlations between public self-consciousness and private self-consciousness were positive, while the correlation of social anxiety was negative.
6. Straight rebuy buyclass and predisposition to gather customer information:

   The highest correlation was a negative relationship with public self-consciousness followed by a positive correlation with being customer oriented. In addition, negative correlations were found with company experience and sales experience. Social anxiety was significant in the discriminant function, but showed only a .10 negative correlation with this behavior.

In a straight rebuy buyclass situation the predisposition to adapt behavior is more affected by self-consciousness variables. In this situation it would not be expected that the salesperson would be predisposed to adapt behavior, yet the results suggest that differences do exist. In addition, these differences are based to a great extent on the characteristics of the salesperson, and not the relational nature of the situation.

Implications

These findings have managerial implications in the areas of salesperson selection, training, and deployment. With regard to selection, this study has shown that there are personality characteristics, such as self-consciousness and social anxiety, that are associated with the predisposition to use adaptive sales techniques. These factors could be verified in currently employed successful salespersons, and then used in the development of employee selection tests. These tests could be used in the hiring process.

In developing training goals and identifying candidates for initial or ongoing training, the findings of this study suggest that both company experience and sales experience were negatively associated with the predisposition to gather customer information in straight rebuy situations. Since gathering such information has been identified as an important component of adaptation, training of more experienced employees could focus on reinforcing the importance of this process. Moreover, after development of selection tests that can identify personality characteristics negatively associated with the predisposition to adapt behavior, internal training candidates whose personalities do not naturally predispose them to use adaptive selling could be identified. These employees could benefit from reinforcement training in the need for and use of adaptive selling. Use of learning activities such as modeling, role playing, social reinforcement, and transfer of training would be useful implementation techniques in such training (Szymanski 1988).

Last, salesperson deployment could be impacted by the findings of this study. In circumstances where territories are structured by customer type based on the characteristics of the buying situation (modified versus straight rebuy), salesperson personality and employment profiles could be developed that would indicate under which selling situations a salesperson would tend to be adaptive. Deployment decisions would then follow from such profiles.

Limitations

Finally, these research results must be interpreted in the light of their limitations. This study was conducted in the food service industry; these results may be different in other industries where products are more complex, the technology is different, or there are more participants in the buying center. Further, the respondents were middlemen, the behavior of manufacturers' direct sales forces could be different. These issues would need to be examined by research into additional industries. Additionally, since the purpose of this study was to examine the effects of relational, self-consciousness, and experiential variables on a salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior, these variables are specific to the present study. Other variables that examine personality characteristics, for example, may produce different findings and should be examined, as was suggested above.

CONCLUSION

This study provided insight into a salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior. Through profiling the various situations and behaviors, a better understanding of the impact of relational, self-consciousness, and experience variables was identified. Salespeople are predisposed to adapt behavior based on a combination of these variables. Suggested future research should include the utilization of salesperson's predisposition to adapt behavior and its impact on salesperson performance.

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APPENDIX
Items Utilized in the Development of Independent Variables

Public Self-Consciousness:
(1=Usually False; 7=Usually True)
1. I'm concerned about the way I present myself.
2. I'm self-conscious about the way I look.
3. I usually worry about making a good impression.
4. I'm concerned about what other people think of me.

Private Self-Consciousness:
(1=Usually False; 7=Usually True)
1. I'm always trying to figure myself out.
2. I reflect about myself a lot.
3. I'm constantly examining my motives.

Social Anxiety:
(1=Usually False; 7=Usually True)
1. It takes me time to overcome my shyness in new situations.
2. I get embarrassed very easily.

Interactional:
(1=Very Unlikely; 7=Very Likely)
1. I would genuinely enjoy helping this customer.
2. This customer would find me easy to talk with.
3. I would work to complete this sale.
4. I would want to do the job well.

Customer Oriented:
(1=Almost Never; 7=Almost Always)
1. I try to get my customers to discuss their needs with me.
2. I try to help my customers achieve their goals.
3. I try to keep the customer's best interest in mind.

Sales Call Planning:
(1=Very Unlikely; 7=Very Likely)

1. Before I make this sales call, I would evaluate the specific information needs of the buyer.
2. Before this sales call, I would consider the unique questions the buyer is likely to ask about my company or my products.
3. Before this sales call, I would review the details of product line information which may have special interest or particular value to the buyer.
4. Before making this sales call, I would collect information on the account's past purchase patterns.
5. Before this sales call, I would consciously try to anticipate the events which are likely to occur in the call.
6. I would seek information to determine the needs of this account.

Competitor Information Gathering:
(1=Very Unlikely; 7=Very Likely)
I would gather information concerning:
1. My competitors' sales force strategies that might be used with this customer.
2. My competitors' distribution policies that might be used with this customer.
3. My competitors' pricing strategies that might be used with this customer.

Company Information Gathering:
(1=Very Unlikely; 7=Very Likely)
I would gather information concerning:
1. How this customer might react to my price.
2. How this customer might react to my company.
3. How this customer might react to my product.

Customer Information Gathering:
(1=Very Unlikely; 7=Very Likely)
I would gather information concerning:
1. Prices of this customer's goods.
2. This customer's product offerings.
3. This customer's market(s).
4. This customer's expansion plans.