

Improving Personal Sales Performance by Considering Customer Personality Traits

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Abstract— The advantages of adaptive selling have been widely studied before but not from the viewpoint of customer personality traits. Therefore, the aim of this article is to find out how to improve personal sales performance by considering customer personality traits. This was examined from the perspective of both salespeople (n=5) and customers (n=955). The results showed that salespeople use adaptive techniques randomly and often subconsciously. Nevertheless, they can read the level of customer extraversion and conscientiousness quite well and adapt their sales approach accordingly. However, coping with customer agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experiences is much more complicated, and some customer behaviors are misread by salespeople. Therefore, some ideas on how to incorporate verbal and non-verbal communication techniques are proposed to improve sales performance.

Keywords: *customer personality, personal sales, performance, adaptive selling, Big Five*

I. INTRODUCTION

What factors influence a salesperson's performance has been studied for years. In their large-scale meta-analysis [1] gathered data from 1918 to 1982 and found many determinants of the performance of salespeople, but they state that the main limitation of their research was that the 'analysis is based on "static" data' (p.116) and salesperson-customer interactions have not been taken into account. [2] stresses that different customers can have different expectations and reactions to various personal sales tactics and the salesperson's behavior, and it is rational to consider these individual preferences. This standpoint was confirmed by a more recent meta-analysis by [3] from 1982–2008, as their study indicates that the degree of adaptiveness in salespeople, among others, has a significant relationship with sales performance. Adaptive selling means that every sales encounter should be different and fit the customer's specifics and has found to influence personal sales performance (see for example the meta-analysis by [4]).

In our opinion, an important aspect of the customer in the personal sales process is their personality traits. Generally, concerning personality traits and consumer behavior, [5] distinguishes two eras: 1) the dark ages, and 2) the renaissance. When the Five Factor Model or the Big Five was developed, the renaissance era began and more studies were made which confirmed that personality traits are important in the consumer behavior context (e.g. [6]-[8]). Therefore, one can assume that personality traits also play a role in the context of personal

sales, but to the authors' knowledge, this matter has not been studied before.

Personal sales requires direct contact with the customer and in addition to face-to-face communication, telephone conversations, video conferencing and text messaging via the internet are also considered suitable options. In this article, however, mainly face-to-face communication is analyzed because in that way it is easier to identify the customer's personality traits. Usually, the salesperson and customer are not closely acquainted, so is it possible for a salesperson to identify anything about the customer's personality traits? Indeed it is. [9] and [10] have shown that humans have developed a rapid and intuitive mechanism for assessing another individual using solely physical attributes, mainly facial expressions. Many experiments have been conducted to find out how well a stranger can evaluate another stranger's personality [11]-[13]. The results of these studies show that even after a brief encounter one can guess quite well some personality characteristics of a stranger. The meta-analysis by [14] demonstrated that by analyzing strangers the best self-other correlation was shown by conscientiousness, extraversion and openness to experiences. Consequently, a salesperson can also make some assumptions about a customer's personality and try to incorporate this knowledge into the selling process.

The aim of this article is to find out how to improve personal sales performance by considering customer personality traits. Information about this matter makes it possible to discover new horizons for enhancing the personal sales process. Two sources are combined to gather the data. At first, 955 customers were questioned (study I) and then interviews with five salespeople (study II) were conducted. The following theoretical section will present the development of the research questions and hypotheses.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The possibility to enhance sales performance through adaptive selling has been studied for over 30 years. [15] defined adaptive selling as follows: 'Adaptive selling 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' (p. 175). Many other researchers also quite unanimously use this definition ([4], [16-18] and others). A number of studies have proven that adaptive sales tactics increase the salesperson's performance [3], [4]. However, there are also some studies that have not found a

significant relationship between adaptive selling and sales performance (see for a review, for example, [16], [18]). As this has not been researched in the context of personality traits, the following research question is set (RQ1): Have salespeople noticed that considering the personality traits of customers is important for personal sales performance?

The degree to which salespeople use adaptive selling is primarily captured using the ADAPTS scale containing 16 items, which was developed by [19]. In relation to a salesperson's performance, this method was used, for example, in studies by [18] and [20]. Different facets of adaptive selling include whether the salesperson recognizes that different selling situations require different techniques, the confidence to use and alter different approaches, the actual use of different approaches in different situations. The sales approach can be, for example, prospect-focused (make a compliment to the customer or ask about their interests), product-benefit-approach (demonstrate values, price), statement approach (salesperson introduces himself), and the peak interest approach (make a joke, give a gift) among others [21], [22]. Concerning personality traits for example, conscientious individuals are probably more interested in product benefits and introverted individuals could be intimidated by dramatic efforts like showmanship, which are typical of the peak interest approach. Therefore, to achieve success in personal sales, the salesperson should notice the reactions of the customer and change tactics.

In addition to the verbal message and its mode of delivery, non-verbal cues are also important. [23] suggest that 'the sales encounter is much like a dance, during which a conversation takes place with the customer leading and the salesperson following' (p. 4). They also point out that customer personality traits are important to consider by adaptive selling. Previous studies have proven that more successful salespeople notice cues, including nonverbal cues more [24], [25]. For example, it has been found that mirroring customer's gestures (hand and head movement, smiles), posture (legs crossed etc.), a tone of voice, breathing patterns and so on, can increase sales [23]. [26] have found that mimicry makes interactions smoother and increases liking. Similarly, [27] proposes that when a person imitates a communication partner, this partner thinks that this person is more persuasive which is possibly favorable in a sales context. The results of another study stress the importance of being on a similar wavelength as the communication partner [28]. These results indicate that, for example, with extraverted individuals it is worth smiling a lot and being energetic but with introverted individuals it is better to be less assertive and calm.

To sum up, previous results indicate that adaptive selling technics both verbal and non-verbal that consider customer specifics benefit selling performance. This article concentrates on the role of personality traits in that context and sets up the following research question (RQ2): Do personal salespeople adapt their behavior according to the customer's personality traits and how?

Individuals with different personality traits may react differently to a sales approach. For some individuals, hearing out the sales offer is a pleasant experience, while others may be more reluctant and even feel uncomfortable about saying

something or turning the offer down immediately. As there are no direct results about how individuals with different personality characteristics react to the sales approach, indirect linkages are drawn. For example, [29] studied the different shopping motives customers with various personality characteristics display for going shopping. He found that individuals with higher levels of extraversion have more hedonic motives meaning they like to visit new stores to see what they have to offer, they like the 'hustle and bustle' of the stores, they enjoy talking to the salespeople, meeting people when shopping [29], which could presumably be favorable from the salesperson's point of view because such individuals are open to new offers and are not disturbed by interacting with others. Their general tendency to be outgoing, talkative and gregarious [30] also supports this standpoint. Therefore, we hypothesize following (H1a): Individuals with high levels of extraversion are more likely to hear out a sales approach.

Similarly, [29] found that individuals with higher levels of openness to experiences have the hedonic motives for shopping listed previously. In addition, they like to be 'pampered' by attentive salespeople [29]. Their general tendency to be curious, have wide interests etc. [30] also supports taking an interest in the sales approach. Consequently, we assume that (H1b): Individuals with high levels of openness to experiences are more likely to hear out a sales approach.

The hedonic shopping motives of agreeable individuals listed previously could also be favorable in the sales approach. What is more, the store crowd does not get on such individuals' nerves and they like to be 'pampered' by attentive salespeople [29]. As they are kind, generous, compliant, tender-minded, and sympathetic [30], they are probably are likely to hear out the salesperson. Next hypothesis is therefore (H1c): Individuals with a high level of agreeableness are more likely to hear out a sales approach.

However, individuals with lower levels of neuroticism have utilitarian shopping motives, meaning it is important for them to be a smart shopper [29]. On the other hand, they do not experience the negative affect (i.e. anger, fear, sadness, shame) of consumption-based situations [31]-[33] and are known to be calm, content, and placid [30]. Due to this discrepancy no clear hypothesis can be set up about neuroticism.

Similarly, the main shopping motives for conscientious individuals are utilitarian in nature. They especially like to hunt for bargains, worry about getting the best deal and love to negotiate with salespeople [29]. Therefore, when a conscientious person has the intention to buy something in an offer, he or she may be quite interested to hear the salesperson out to find out whether it is worth buying, and when necessary, to debate the price. However, as conscientious individuals have a tendency to be organized, strategic, responsible, and highly disciplined [30], they may not hear out a personal sales offer because it is unexpected and they have not planned to spend time on this. Consequently, their choice, in the authors' opinion, is greatly dependent on the situation and it is not possible to set a general hypothesis.

Personal sales is a very expensive vehicle [34] because talking personally to many customers takes time and resources. Consequently, it is wise to select carefully which individuals to

approach. From previous sales experiences, salespeople certainly have some know-how regarding what kind of individuals react more favorably to personal sales offers, making a purchase, and therefore, prefer to choose them. But there is another side to this – how the customers feel when the salesperson approaches them. On the one hand, salespeople are interested in high performance but on the other hand they should think about long-term success. [35] point out that most studies of adaptive selling concentrate on short-term consequences like sales numbers, but there are also long-term goals like customer relationships and satisfaction. Therefore, on the other hand, salespeople should be sensitive to the customer's needs and notice how they feel about somebody approaching them. Certainly, for some customers it is easy to refuse the sales offer but some may feel very uncomfortable and their attitudes towards personal sales could suffer, and this could influence possible future sales. What is more, customers may agree to buy something reluctantly just to get rid of the pushy salesperson and regret it afterwards. Derived from this, in the authors' opinion, it is important to analyze which individuals with certain personality traits are less uncomfortable refusing a personal sales offer when they are not interested.

Previous studies show that individuals with higher levels of extraversion exercise more control in retail situations (e.g. having no trouble ending conversations with telemarketers or door-to-door salespeople) [36], they are less anxious, threatened and exhibit more active coping methods in consumption situations [37], they have higher propensity to complain [38]). This can be explained by their assertive, active and enthusiastic nature [30]. What is more, even negative experiences do not influence their mood considerably compared to introverted individuals [39]-[40], which shows that they can confidently turn down a personal sales offer without feeling bad. Derived from previous results, our hypothesis in this matter is (H2a): Individuals with high levels of extraversion are more likely to feel comfortable declining a personal sales offer.

Similarly, conscientious individuals presumably also have a little discomfort in turning down a personal sales offer based on [36] and [38] studies. They are oriented to be efficient, organized and responsible [30]. Consequently, they have their goals in sight and concentrate on practical solutions. We hypothesize (H2b): Individuals with a high level of conscientiousness are more likely to feel comfortable declining a personal sales offer.

By contrast, individuals with higher levels of neuroticism may feel unhappy turning down personal sales offers because they are anxious, vulnerable and thin-skinned [30]. In addition, as a result of a negative mood they have more negative emotions compared to emotionally stable individuals [39], [40]. Hypothesis set is as follows (H2c): Individuals with a high level of neuroticism are more likely to feel uncomfortable declining a personal sales offer.

Concerning agreeableness the evidence is contradictory. In related studies, researchers hypothesized that agreeable individuals would have less control in retail situations [36] and are less likely to complain about something [38]. This can be

explained by their compliant, tender-minded, kind and generous nature [30]. But the studies did not confirm this standpoint. Therefore, no hypothesis is set about agreeableness. As there are not enough results available in the consumption context about openness to experiences, no hypothesis is set in this matter also.

The next question is whether individuals with certain personality characteristics actually buy more of what is offered them via personal sales. No studies have been conducted on this topic but some indications can be drawn from studies about relationships between personality traits and impulsive buying. Impulsive buying is defined differently in various sources, but the common element is that impulse buying is unplanned and spontaneous [41]-[43]. In the authors' opinion, buying something via personal sales has an impulse buying element to it. The offer is usually unplanned and unexpected, and often there is not much time to deliberate. Consequently, when somebody has a tendency to buy something spontaneously and without thorough thinking, he or she is more receptive to buying something via personal sales.

To sum up the previous research about how personality traits could favor more giving in to personal sales offers we can say that results about extraversion are quite straightforward – higher levels of extraversion could contribute to impulsive buying [44]-[46]. Consequently, it can be presumed that extraverted individuals are also more receptive to buying something via personal sales. We hypothesize that (H3a): Individuals with high levels of extraversion are more likely to buy something via personal selling.

Similarly, many studies reveal relationships with a low level of conscientiousness and impulsive buying tendencies [44]-[46]. In addition, the research by [29] demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of conscientiousness have utilitarian shopping motives and they do not buy impulsively. Derived from this and also considering that individuals with higher levels of conscientiousness have an inclination to be responsible, competent, dutiful, disciplined and deliberate [30], it can be concluded that they are less likely to buy things via personal sales offers. Our hypothesis is (H3b): Individuals with a high level of conscientiousness are less likely to buy something via personal selling.

Some previous studies show that higher levels of neuroticism could contribute to impulsive buying [45]. This is quite logical because according to [30], impulsiveness is in the nature of more neurotic individuals. According to [29], it is less important for them to be a smart shopper. Consequently, it is also proposed in this study that higher levels of neuroticism contribute to buying via personal selling. The final hypothesis is therefore (H3c): Individuals with a high level of neuroticism are more likely to buy something via personal selling.

The results about agreeableness and openness to experiences are contradictory, or these traits were not included in the research. For this reason, no hypotheses are set about agreeableness and openness to experiences concerning personal sales purchases. In the following section an overview is given of the data and methodology used for this study.

III. DATA AND METHOD

Study I was conducted in February 2013 in Estonia. A questionnaire was compiled and distributed through the e-mail lists of various companies, the University of Tartu and Tallinn University of Technology (including students and university employees), in social media, internet forums and so on. Consequently, it is a convenience sample. All in all, 955 individuals participated. Most of them live in the city (78 percent) and are women (75 percent). Due to the fact that the questionnaire was distributed via the internet, mostly younger inhabitants participated (54 percent of the respondents are 30 years old or younger, about thirty percent are 31–45 years old and 13 percent 46 years and older). Involving university students and employees brought a high number of participants with higher education (62 percent).

The questionnaire in study I consisted of three parts: 1) personality traits inventory, 2) questions about personal sales experiences, 3) socio-demographic background data. To measure the personality traits the Five Factor Model of personality (also known as the Big Five) was selected. Permission to use the Estonian version of the Big Five was acquired from Kenn Konstabel from the Institute of Psychology of the University of Tartu. The personality traits part of the questionnaire consists of 30 statements and a scale from -3 to +3. In terms of reliability, the Big Five scales were as follows: neuroticism 0.74, extraversion 0.74, openness to experiences 0.54, agreeableness 0.48 and conscientiousness 0.68. These results are at an acceptable level in Kenn Konstabel's opinion, and somewhat lower values in the case of openness to experiences and agreeableness are anticipated by this type of study in his experience.

Statements about personal sales were compiled by the authors because no previous suitable measurement tool was available. All in all, 14 questions were asked, but for this article only part of the survey is used: customer behavior when a personal sales offer is made, how comfortable it is to turn the sales offer down, how many purchases are made via personal selling and whether adjusted offers are made by salespeople or a standard approach is used in the customer's opinion. For the data analysis of this part, the χ^2 test was used. All the required assumptions for conducting this analysis were met. The acceptable significance level chosen was 0.05.

Study II was conducted in March 2014 in the two largest Estonian cities: Tallinn and Tartu. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with five salespeople (three men and two women) with a duration of 30–45 minutes. All the respondents were quite young (24–28 years) but had considerable work experience in personal sales (4–8 years). They sell different products and services, for example, pension funds, business software, insurance, telecommunication services, books etc. mostly in supermarkets. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed into 11 single-spaced pages of typed material. The interview plan from study II consisted of 14 questions, but for this article only four of them are used to explore whether considering customer personality traits helps to boost sales, whether they consider the customer's personality traits in their job and how exactly, whether customers with certain personality characteristics are more willing to hear out a selling

offer and buy more from them. In study II qualitative data was systematized using the NVivo software. The first step was to create first order codes and then these were aggregated into higher order codes. The study results will be introduced in the following section.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We will start by presenting the results for the first two research questions. The first question was about whether salespeople have noticed that considering customer personality traits is important for personal sales performance. In that matter all salespeople were unanimous: in their opinion taking notice of the personality traits of customers helps substantially to boost sales. They pointed out that individuals with different personality traits have different reasons for buying and they also like to buy in a different way.

The second research question was whether personal sales salespeople adapt their behavior according to the customer's personality traits and how. From the customers' viewpoint they feel that in about 82 percent of cases the salespeople use a standard approach. This result does not say anything about considering personality traits but provides a general view of the customers' perspective. Salespeople have an entirely different opinion. All the salespeople interviewed reported that they have more or less adapted their approach based on the customer's personality traits but there is indeed room for improvement because three of the five salespeople admitted that they think they have the necessary knowledge about this topic but in practice they do not use it intentionally. However, all said that they subconsciously adjust their behavior according to the customer's personality traits. The opinion of salesperson C illustrates the situation well: For that matter, I still use the same text that is convenient for me to use and I use it for everyone. But I have some places where I adjust it depending on the person /.../. (female, 24 years old)

The results showed that verbal communication of salespeople could be improved because only a limited number of the possible sales approaches are used considering personality traits according to this study: firstly, adjusting energy level, jokes and the use of emotional arguments, and secondly, focusing on facts and details is varied. Certainly, the prospect focused approach, which means asking questions to find out the customer's needs and personality, and the comparison approach could be used more because each of these techniques was mentioned by only one salesperson. Maybe the statement approach could also be used more, meaning to introduce oneself to make the customer feel more comfortable. What is more, [21] have found that more successful salespeople open their approach with the statement approach.

On the other hand, the non-verbal aspects could also be improved. Salespeople value being on the same wavelength as the customers and adapt their energy level, a tone of voice and amount of smiling but it is also possible to harmonize gestures, posture and breathing patterns for example. In the authors' opinion, non-verbal cues should be noticed and incorporated more deliberately into the sales process.

Seven hypotheses were proven by this study and two not (see Fig. 1). The results illustrated that a high level of extraversion is probably the most favorable trait for salespeople from many angles. Firstly, this trait is easier to recognize. Secondly, both customers' and salespeople's opinions concerning extraversion coincide, and finally, the findings of the current study pointed out that individuals with a high level of extraversion listen to offers more gladly, it is less inconvenient for them to turn down selling offers and they make more personal sales purchases compared to individuals with low levels of extraversion which means that hypotheses H1a, H2a and H3a are proven by the study. The reason for this could be that according to the salespeople, a cheerful, active and eager style is more suitable for more extraverted individuals. Further, individuals are generally not only more drawn to individuals who are similar to them but are more influenced by them (see literature review in [47]). In addition, the results indicate that individuals with a low level of extraversion say frankly 'no' more often when somebody is approaching them, but they feel uncomfortable in this. To sum up this part of the discussion, it can be concluded that approaches adopted by salespeople that consider the level of extraversion in the customer are successful. They vary how emotional their approach is, how energetic and smiley they are and how quickly to speak. However, in terms of verbal techniques, the hedonic nature of extraverted individuals could be exploited further, and ways to make less extraverted individuals feel better when turning down personal sales offers could also be applied.

Individuals with a high level of conscientiousness are also quite favorable personal sales customers. This trait is like extraversion – relatively easy to recognize. The present article proved that conscientious individuals do not feel uncomfortable turning down personal sales offers which proves hypothesis H2b. What is more, individuals with a high level of conscientiousness do not buy less via personal selling compared to individuals with a low level of conscientiousness which does not support hypothesis H3b. When asking who buys more from them, characteristics related to both high and low levels of conscientiousness were mentioned by the salespeople. Salesperson B has noticed this and said: Decisive people often say 'no' but as often also 'yes'. (male, 25 years old) The same was shown by customers' study. The context may play a role here. On the one hand, more conscientious individuals are interested in good deals [29]; on the other hand, they are less receptive to unplanned buying [46], [48]. Consequently, more conscientious individuals are maybe not highly impulsive in their decisions, which may not seem favorable for personal selling, but salespeople manifest ethical behavior and prefer customers who make deliberate decisions and express their views openly. To sum up this part of the discussion, it can be concluded that the approach adopted by salespeople that considers the level of conscientiousness in customers is also successful. They vary how detailed and fact-based an approach to use, which means that salespeople have captured the utilitarian nature of conscientious individuals.

Hypothesis H1c found proof according to both sides (customers and salespeople) of the analysis. However, there are more individuals with a high level of agreeableness in the

group where individuals listen to the sales offer reluctantly. Yes, the positive side is that a high level of agreeableness contributes to hearing out sales offers, but the negative side is that among these there are more people that are not happy about the situation. As salesperson D puts it: It hurts much more when a person listens to your offer without saying anything and you wait a lot of time and then it turns out he or she does not buy anything. (female, 28 years old) The problem is that for a salesperson it is very hard to discover whether an agreeable person is feeling uncomfortable or not because as empathetic individuals they tend to exhibit a 'chameleon effect' compared to less empathetic individuals [36]. The chameleon effect can express itself verbally or non-verbally. Consequently, when a salesperson is enthusiastic about the product a more agreeable person may seem to be the same. In addition, some problems can emerge from the circumstance that some salespeople have the impression that individuals with high levels of agreeableness make more personal sales purchases. In some ways, this is true because there are more individuals with high agreeableness among those who have made one purchase but among those who have made three or more purchases are more individuals with low levels of agreeableness. This could contribute to salespeople not noticing customers as having low levels of agreeableness because they do not perceive them as potentially good customers. What is more, as salespeople value customers with a straight answer, individuals with low levels of agreeableness are just like that. They more often say frankly when they are not interested in offers and do not feel bad. So the solution is not to miss customers with a low level of agreeableness and when faced with those with a high level of agreeableness encourage them to offer their opinions and a possible decision during the sales presentation and also reassure them that it is not a problem to refuse the offer. However, the challenge is that agreeableness as a trait is not very easily recognizable by strangers. Only a few studies show that this trait could be fairly easily identified [13].

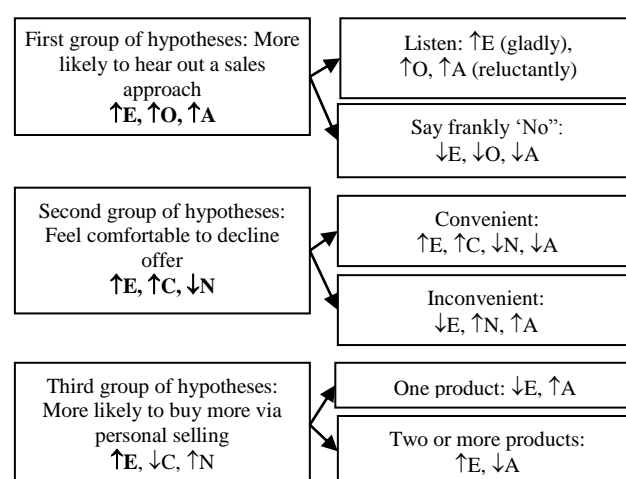


FIGURE 1. STUDY RESULTS ABOUT CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR IN THE PERSONAL SALES CONTEXT

Notes: ↑- high level of certain personality trait ↓- low level of certain personality trait; E- extraversion, C- conscientiousness, A- agreeableness, N- neuroticism, O- openness to experiences; Boldface: hypotheses proven by the study. Source: Compiled by the authors

Another quite problematic trait in personal sales context is openness to experiences. Individuals with a high level of openness to experiences listen more to personal sales offers which proves hypothesis H1b but do it more reluctantly than individuals with a lower level of openness to experiences. An additional problem is that salespeople believe they make more purchases, but the study of customers did not confirm that. Consequently, salespeople could invest their sales efforts to individuals with high levels of openness to experiences but the end result may not be as favorable as expected. One solution when faced with customers with high levels of openness could be to ascertain their level of interest during the sales presentation.

Controversial results were also gathered for neuroticism. Based on previous research it was hypothesized that individuals with high levels of neuroticism make more personal sales purchases because they have impulsive tendencies (H3c). The customer study did not confirm that. The reason for this may be that all studies presented in the theoretical part were made on student samples, and therefore, hypothetical behavior was analyzed. What is more, the personal sales context was not specifically investigated in the mentioned studies. Personal sales is different from shopping by yourself in a store because it includes intense contact with a salesperson. [49] have proven that neuroticism is related to experiencing mixed emotions. Consequently, more neurotic individuals may like one aspect of a personal sales product or approach but dislike another. Neurotic individuals are also receptive to mood induction [50], which in personal sales practices may mean that when a more neurotic person is for some reason having a bad day he or she could react differently to personal sales offers or vice versa. In addition, the findings support hypothesis H2c which stated that for individuals with high levels of neuroticism it is more uncomfortable to turn down personal sales offers, which makes the situation even more complicated because they may develop more negative feelings toward personal sales as a whole. One solution could be to exert less pressure to buy when communicating with rather neurotic customers and assure them that it is alright to say 'no'. This could reduce the tension and anxiety levels for neurotic individuals and may lead to a positive outcome this time or lay the groundwork for future contacts. Another problem is that the study of salespeople showed that they believe that less neurotic individuals buy more from them, which was not confirmed by the customer study. This could lead to favoring less neurotic customers meanwhile more neurotic individuals are equally willing to hear out the selling approach and buy something compared to less neurotic individuals. As with agreeableness and openness to experiences, level of neuroticism is also not easily recognizable.

To sum up, we can say that the main challenge in considering personality traits in the personal sales context is detecting the personality traits of customers. Some traits are fairly easy to recognize but some are harder. There are also time and money constraints. It is worth deliberating how much time to spend with one customer, getting to know him or her, or is it better to move on quickly to the next prospect. Training salespeople to notice personality traits, verbal and non-verbal cues and developing special scenarios to use is also very costly.

The solution could be choosing to concentrate on 'the easier' personality traits like extraversion and conscientiousness and more deliberately incorporate their specifics into the selling process. However, real competitive advantage can come from choosing the less noticeable traits and with the help of their peculiarities find new ways to increase sales performance. Even little improvements can make personal the sales process more enjoyable for customers and salespeople, and consequently, it could also improve sales results.

The main limitation of this article is the study sample, because the customers surveyed were rather young educated women who live in urban areas. Behavior in the personal sales context could differ among customers with other backgrounds. The salespeople were also rather young and engaged in the two largest cities in Estonia. Again, different personal sales tactics could be used by salespeople in rural or smaller areas. Another limitation is that in this article the sales performance of the salespeople was not measured. Therefore, we do not exactly know how much considering personality traits affects actual sales performance. In the future, studies of this aspect could be added. Adapting the ADAPTS scale for research in the personality traits context could also provide valuable information and comparisons with other adaptive selling areas. What is more, some cultural differences may emerge within personal sales, which is another opportunity for future studies to investigate.

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