

Cultural influence in salespeople behaviors and emotional regulation

Influencia cultural en los comportamientos de los vendedores y la regulación emocional

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Abstract

In this paper we look at cultural influence (Individualist vs Collectivistic) in salespeople Regulation of Emotion, Interpersonal Conflict, Customer Orientation and Job Performance. In both an individualistic and a collectivist culture, regulation of emotions is negatively related to interpersonal conflict. In a collectivist culture, sales people who perform better emotional regulation will achieve better customer orientation. Sales managers should make it a priority to train salespeople to strengthen their emotional regulation and create conflict management mechanisms for job performance improvement.

key words: emotional intelligence; emotional regulation; salespeople behaviors; cultural influence

Resumen

En este artículo analizamos la influencia cultural (individualista vs colectivista) en la regulación emocional, conflicto interpersonal, orientación al cliente y el desempeño laboral de vendedores. Tanto en una cultura individualista como colectiva, la regulación de emociones está negativamente relacionada con el conflicto interpersonal. En una cultura colectivista, los vendedores con mejor regulación emocional lograrán una mejor orientación al cliente. Los gerentes de ventas deben capacitar a vendedores para fortalecer su regulación emocional y crear mecanismos de gestión de conflictos.

Palabras clave: inteligencia emocional; regulación emocional; comportamientos de vendedores; influencia cultural

1. Introduction

Academic research have been paying great interest to the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in shaping individual behaviors within organizations. This has led to numerous studies exploring the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in the organizational behavioral arena. EI has been often “touted as a panacea for modern business (Zeidner et al., 2004, page 372). This leads to the idea that emotional intelligence can play a major role in customer interaction service, such as service and sales jobs (O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, and Story, 2011). Emotions are a key force that shape goal orientation. In turn, highly emotionally intelligent vendors are better able to decode customer and coworker messages (Brown, Cron, and Slocum 1997). Further, they state that “emotions constitute a powerful psychological force that can affect behavior and performance in important

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ways” (page 39). Likewise Goleman (1998) attributed the success of the high performers primarily to emotional intelligence rather than cognitive abilities. In view of this, Kidwell et al. (2011) state that in spite this influence “understanding of how emotions are interpreted and employed in marketing exchanges remains surprisingly limited” (page 78).

In organizations, meeting customer needs and achieving organizational goals requires individuals in different functional groups to pursue interdependent activities and channel physical, verbal, and mental abilities towards a common goal. As the complexity of businesses increases due to economic and technical changes, interdependency among functional groups in organizations is also growing. This occurs frequently in sales areas, as success depends on the salesman's ability to work with other employees in the organization (Jones, Dixon, Chonko, and Cannon, 2005; Sheth and Sharma, 2008). Despite efforts by companies to achieve smooth work environments, it is not uncommon to see employee discussions and abuse within workplaces (Penney and Spector, 2005). The Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) affective event theory states that employee attitudes and behaviors are primarily affected by events in the workplace. Interpersonal conflicts cause dissatisfaction with work, in turn less organizational commitment, which at the end impacts job performance (Harris, Harvey, and Kacmar, 2011). In conclusion, companies and managers have an interest in developing ways to enhance interpersonal relationships. Notwithstanding the foregoing, research is limited, particularly in sales settings, and even more so in cultural differences between sales forces.

In this research, using what has been observed by the scientific literature regarding the role of emotional intelligence, the interpersonal conflict of employees, customer orientation, and customer orientation in job performance, we have analyzed the differences between two different cultures, collectivist versus individualist. In particular, we focus on differences in the influence of emotional intelligence to avoid interpersonal conflicts and encourage a greater focus on the client, and therefore improve job performance.

1.1. Conceptual background

High EI can provide people with the ability to better identify, assess, understand, and manage their emotions and thus shape behaviors (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Rahim and Marvel (2011) state that in the case of troublesome colleagues, those employees with high IE do not allow their negative feelings or the feelings of other individuals to inhibit them. This will allow them to work effectively with other people and also better manage conflicts.

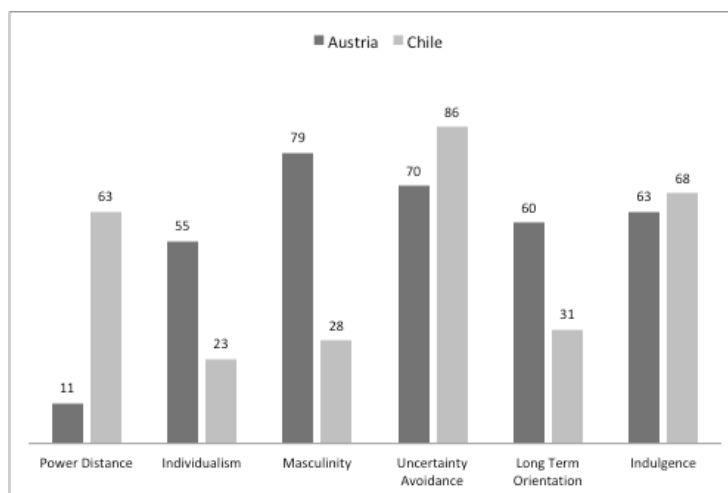
Gross (1999) states that emotional regulation is about “the ways individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience or express these emotions” (page 557). Emotional regulation is developed through the evaluation of emotions and the selection of the situation, so that when people face a given situation, they can modulate their feelings and associated behavior depending on their evaluation of feelings and the emotions of others (Urry and Gross, 2010).

Hohenberg and Homburg (2016) finds that sales force steering effectiveness strongly depends on sales reps' national culture. In that way, Cortez and Johnston (2018) affirm that “Latin America, as is true of many developed and emerging markets, has a strong presence of industrial transactions. The configuration and convergence-divergence of marketing capabilities are relevant for the understanding of the globalization phenomenon. Studies shows directional convergence between some countries, there also is interesting divergence between all Latin American countries and the USA.”

Hofstede's cultural dimensions is a theoretical framework based on understanding and adapting to cross-cultural communications. Hofstede developed the model by examining results of global employees' views on values. The findings were the first to quantifiably explain observed differences between cultures. The original framework included four dimensions: individualism-collectivism; uncertainty avoidance; power distance, and masculinity-

femininity. Hofstede's later work added two dimensions: long-term orientation and indulgence (Rodríguez and Boyer, 2018). To minimize that level of work, Hofstede created The Country Comparison Tool, calculates scores (1 to 120) for each of the cultural dimension and allows comparison between cultures. Figure 1 provides a comparison outcome of Austria and Chile on each dimension as an example, which are the countries object of study. See figure 1.

Figure 1
Hofstede Dimensions Austria vs Chile



Source: <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>

1.2. Hypotheses

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict and its negative effect has been the subject of several studies (Harris et al., 2011; Sliter, Pui, Sliter and Jex, 2011; Spector and Jex, 1998). Interpersonal conflict at work corresponds to a range of behaviors that include interpersonal abuse such as profanity, yelling and other unwanted acts (Sliter et al. 2011). Since interpersonal conflict in the workplace generates negative perceptions, it is likely that regulating emotions can decrease interpersonal conflict (Schieman and Reid, 2008), and that the regulation of emotions is also negatively related to interpersonal conflict (Bullemore, Mulki, and Görne, 2019).

Based on this, it is stated that:

H1: Regulation of emotions is negatively related to interpersonal conflict not depending on the individualist and/or collectivistic approach.

Customer Orientation

Research attribute that customer orientation generates desirable results such as purchase intention, customer confidence, increased loyalty, customer satisfaction and better job performance (Cross, Brashear, Rigdon, and Bellenger, 2007; Kumar, Venkatesan, and Reinartz, 2008; Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann, 2011). Sellers' success can be explained by their ability to structure customer-centric solutions Bosworth et al. (2003). According to Saxe and Weitz (1982) customer orientation is the basis for developing long-term relationships with customers and for delivering products that meet the needs of those customers. Lenaghan, Buda, and Eisner (2007) affirm that people who have a higher emotional intelligence are confident, have an optimistic perspective, and generally project a positive image. Based on this, it is stated that:

H2: Emotional regulation is positively related to customer orientation not depending on the individualist and/or

collectivistic approach.

H3: Customer orientation is negatively related to Interpersonal conflict.

H3a: Customer orientation is negatively related to Interpersonal conflict not depending on the individualist and/or collectivistic approach.

Job Performance

Sales managers prioritize improving vendors' job performance, as improving profits depends largely on increased sales. One of the main factors of increased stress that affects salespeople is interpersonal conflict (Narayanan, Menon, and Spector, 1999), and this causes abusive behaviors, decreased effort, and interpersonal deviation (Bruk-Lee and Spector, 2006; Fox, Spector, and Miles, 2001; Penney and Spector, 2005).

The preceding discussion suggests that:

H4: Interpersonal conflict is negatively related to job performance not depending on the individualist and/or collectivistic approach.

Customer-oriented vendors are committed to meeting their customers' needs, increasing customer satisfaction in order to develop a long-term relationship. Research shows a positive relationship between customer orientation, job performance, and customer loyalty (Cross et al., 2007; Franke and Park, 2006; Kumar et al., 2008). Based on this, the following replication hypotheses are established:

H5: Customer orientation is positively related to job performance and does not depend on the individualistic and / or collectivist approach.

2. Methodology

Customer orientation was measured with scale used by Homburg, Grozdanovic, and Klarmann, 2007). Emotional regulation was measured with a scale by Law, Wong, and Song (2004). Job performance was measured with scale used by Miao & Evans (2007). Measures were Likert type scales (1- strongly disagree, 7- strongly agree). Interpersonal conflict 4-item scale by Spector and Jex's (1998) which uses 6 point scale (1- never, 6 – extremely often).

We used responses of two samples of B2B salespeople working in Austria (sample 1) and in Chile (sample 2). The survey was administered in german for people from Austria and in spanish using items from well-established and previously published scales in english which were translated to serman and spanish and back translated to english. In sample 1 (Austria), of the 77 responses 23.4% were females, 75% were males and 1.6% did not indicate their gender. Age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 58 years with a mean age of 27.66 (standard deviation = 8.23 years). The tenure with the company ranged from under a year to 27 years (standard deviation 14.11 years). In sample 2 (Chile), of the 67 responses 41.80% were females, 58.20% were males. Age of the respondents ranged from 27 to 64 years with a mean age of 39-24 (standard deviation = 8.14 years). The tenure with the company ranged from under a year to 22 years (standard deviation 4.78 years)

We perform statistical tests including repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare emotional regulation, self-emotions appraisal, use of emotion, regulation of emotion, customer orientarion, job performance, individualism and collectivism to compare differences within european culture (individualistic) and latinamerican culture (collectivistic) in salespeople. A significance level of 0.1 indicates a 10% risk of concluding that a difference exists when there is no actual difference. At $p < 0,10$, collectivistic and individualistic approaches differed in their assessment (see Table 1):

Table 1
Difference between samples Chile vs Austria

| | Chile | | | Austria | | | Signif. (p) |
|--|-------|------|------|---------|------|------|-------------|
| | N | Mean | Sd | N | Mean | sd | |
| Emotional regulation (Law, Wong and Song, 2004). | | | | | | | |
| I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time. | 73 | 5,45 | 1,30 | 77 | 5,31 | 1,37 | 0,52 |
| I have a good understanding of my own emotions on the job. | 73 | 5,79 | 1,18 | 77 | 5,69 | 1,22 | 0,59 |
| I really understand what I feel. | 72 | 5,58 | 1,20 | 77 | 5,43 | 1,37 | 0,47 |
| I always know whether or not I am happy with my job. | 73 | 5,79 | 1,45 | 77 | 5,70 | 1,34 | 0,68 |
| Self-Emotions Appraisal (Law, Wong and Song, 2004). | | | | | | | |
| I always know my co-workers' emotions from their behaviors. | 73 | 5,18 | 1,29 | 77 | 5,16 | 1,48 | 0,92 |
| I am a good observer of my colleagues' emotions. | 73 | 5,45 | 1,40 | 77 | 5,36 | 1,41 | 0,70 |
| I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others workers. | 73 | 5,38 | 1,32 | 77 | 4,97 | 1,57 | 0,09 |
| I have a good understanding of the emotions of people around me. | 73 | 5,63 | 1,22 | 77 | 5,53 | 1,30 | 0,22 |
| Use of Emotion (Law, Wong and Song, 2004). | | | | | | | |
| I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them. | 72 | 6,46 | 0,71 | 77 | 5,53 | 1,49 | 0,00 |
| I always tell myself I am a competent person. | 72 | 6,61 | 0,57 | 77 | 5,30 | 1,49 | 0,00 |
| I am a self-motivating person. | 72 | 6,42 | 0,76 | 77 | 5,74 | 1,19 | 0,00 |
| I would always encourage myself to try my best. | 72 | 6,46 | 0,71 | 77 | 5,64 | 1,25 | 0,00 |
| Regulation of Emotion (Law, Wong and Song, 2004). | | | | | | | |
| I am able to control my temper so that I can handle difficulties rationally. | 72 | 5,86 | 1,04 | 77 | 5,14 | 1,51 | 0,00 |
| I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions. | 72 | 5,78 | 1,02 | 77 | 5,18 | 1,55 | 0,01 |
| I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry. | 72 | 5,47 | 1,21 | 77 | 4,64 | 1,69 | 0,00 |
| I have good control of my own emotions. | 72 | 5,79 | 1,02 | 77 | 5,18 | 1,63 | 0,01 |
| Customer orientation (Homburg, Grozdanovic and Klarmann, (2007). | | | | | | | |
| A good employee has to have the customers' best interests in mind. . | 75 | 6,40 | 0,89 | 77 | 5,64 | 1,26 | 0,00 |
| I try to achieve my goals by satisfying customers/clients. | 75 | 6,36 | 0,80 | 77 | 5,61 | 1,15 | 0,00 |
| I try to find what kind of solutions would be most helpful to customers. | 75 | 6,53 | 0,66 | 77 | 5,69 | 1,13 | 0,00 |
| I try to give customers an accurate expectation of what we will do for them. | 75 | 6,52 | 0,66 | 77 | 5,45 | 1,11 | 0,00 |
| Job performance (Miao and Evans (2007) or Cravens et al. 2001) | | | | | | | |
| Building effective relationships with customers. | 93 | 5,39 | 1,20 | 79 | 4,97 | 1,59 | 0,055 |
| Making effective presentations to customers. | 93 | 5,10 | 1,17 | 80 | 4,13 | 1,68 | 0,00 |
| Keeping expenses at acceptable levels. | 93 | 5,24 | 1,36 | 79 | 4,52 | 1,59 | 0,00 |
| Achieving sales targets and other business objectives. | 93 | 5,52 | 1,18 | 79 | 4,54 | 1,51 | 0,00 |

| | Chile | | | Austria | | | Signif. (p) |
|---|-------|------|------|---------|------|------|-------------|
| | N | Mean | Sd | N | Mean | sd | |
| Understanding our products and services. | 93 | 5,77 | 1,39 | 79 | 5,29 | 1,79 | 0,048 |
| Providing feedback to management. | 92 | 5,57 | 1,21 | 79 | 4,52 | 1,82 | 0,00 |
| Understanding customer needs and work processes. | 92 | 5,68 | 0,92 | 79 | 4,99 | 1,56 | 0,00 |
| Contributing to my sales unit's revenues. | 91 | 5,65 | 1,12 | 79 | 4,37 | 1,50 | 0,00 |
| Individualism (Robert & Wasti, 2002) | | | | | | | |
| Each worker is encouraged to realize his or her own unique potential. | 72 | 3,90 | 1,90 | 77 | 4,97 | 1,35 | 0,00 |
| People with good ideas make sure management knows ideas are theirs. | 72 | 4,36 | 1,70 | 77 | 4,92 | 1,45 | 0,03 |
| Employees' ability to think for themselves is valid. | 72 | 5,17 | 1,51 | 77 | 4,99 | 1,25 | 0,43 |
| Individuals who stand out in a high performing group are recognized. | 72 | 4,63 | 2,03 | 77 | 5,31 | 1,38 | 0,02 |
| Employees value independence in their jobs. | 72 | 5,50 | 1,43 | 77 | 5,09 | 1,36 | 0,08 |
| Competition between employees is accepted. | 72 | 5,04 | 1,54 | 77 | 4,79 | 1,52 | 0,32 |
| Management and supervisors are protective of and generous to loyal workers. | 72 | 4,82 | 1,74 | 77 | 4,90 | 1,46 | 0,77 |
| Collectivism (Robert & Wasti, 2002) | | | | | | | |
| Decisions about changes in work methods are made jointly by supervisors and employees. | 69 | 3,65 | 1,85 | 77 | 4,64 | 1,22 | 0,00 |
| Employees are taken care of like members of a family. | 68 | 3,93 | 1,67 | 77 | 4,84 | 1,46 | 0,00 |
| Everyone shares responsibility for the organizations' failures as well as its success. | 69 | 4,01 | 1,92 | 77 | 4,75 | 1,26 | 0,01 |
| Regardless of hierarchical level, employees take each other's views into consideration. | 69 | 4,51 | 1,67 | 77 | 4,81 | 1,21 | 0,22 |
| Once someone is hired, the organization takes care of that person's overall welfare. | 68 | 4,07 | 1,86 | 77 | 4,70 | 1,40 | 0,02 |
| Everyone is kept informed about major decisions that affect the success of the company. | 69 | 4,45 | 1,96 | 77 | 4,68 | 1,51 | 0,43 |

Source: Author's

A correlation analysis was done using SPSS 25 to test the relationships among the constructs at the correlational level. Table 1 below shows the correlation structure, means, and standard deviations for all constructs used in the study. Emotional regulation shows strong positive relationships with job performance and customer orientation and a negative relationship with interpersonal conflict. Both job performance and customer orientation are negatively related to interpersonal conflict. Customer orientation and job performance are positively related. None of the demographic variables showed significant relationships with latent constructs. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using SPSS 25 and AMOS 25 to assess the properties of the latent variables.

3. Results

The hypotheses testing can be summarized as shown in Table 2:

Table 2
Hypotheses testing

| Hypotheses | Empirical finding |
|---|-------------------|
| H1: Regulation of emotions is negatively related to interpersonal conflict not depending on the individualist and/or collectivistic approach. | <i>true</i> |
| H2: Emotional regulation is positively related to customer orientation not depending on the individualist and/or collectivistic approach. | <i>false</i> |
| H3: Customer orientation is negatively related to Interpersonal conflict. | <i>true</i> |
| H3a: Customer orientation is negatively related to Interpersonal conflict not depending on the individualist and/or collectivistic approach. | <i>false</i> |
| H4: Interpersonal conflict is negatively related to job performance not depending on the individualist and/or collectivistic approach. | <i>true</i> |
| H5: Customer orientation is positively related to job performance not depending on the individualist and/or collectivistic approach. | <i>false</i> |

Source: Author's

Success in the current competitive environment requires strong customer orientation and good inter functional coordination among employees within an organization. These workplace interactions are strongly influenced by employee emotions (Verbeke, 1997). The multiple interactions with co-workers to orchestrate support for meeting customer needs, complaints, and unanticipated requests can be challenging and stressful. The findings of the present study show that regulation of emotions is critical for reducing interpersonal conflict and for effective job performance. While some level of interpersonal conflicts are unavoidable when large number of people are working together, regulation of emotions can go a long way in developing satisfactory solutions for customers. Successful organizations are known for customer oriented employees who are able to coordinate efforts and build a synergistic effort between various employees and departments (Narver and Slater, 1990). The study results show that employees should be aware of the need to regulate their emotions to promote positive interaction and foster customer orientation. Studies have shown that abilities such as self –appraisal and regulation of emotions can be possible with the right work environment and training. Mayer and Salovey (1997) state that people can be trained to acquire and enhance emotional intelligence levels. Kidwell et al. (2011) recommend that sales managers should assess and identify areas of EI gaps to focus and initiate training programs aimed at filling these gaps. Sales managers should make it a priority to train salespeople to strengthen their emotional regulation and create conflict management mechanisms if they want to improve the job performance.

4. Conclusions

In both an individualistic and a collectivist culture, regulation of emotions is negatively related to interpersonal conflict. Managers must create conditions to work interpersonal conflicts in order to achieve better job performance. In a collectivist culture, sales people who perform better emotional regulation will achieve better customer orientation. In turn, customer orientation is negatively related to Interpersonal conflict. Our research does not demonstrate these factors to be relevant in individualistic culture.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that are inherent to any organizational research. First, this is a cross sectional study thus ruling out causality. Second, as MacCallum et al. (1993) point out there could be a number of equivalent models with fit indices similar to the model presented in this study. Finally, In the first study we used responses only from salespeople from Latin America which is a highly collectivistic culture that values group harmony and the results may vary in societies with different cultural values. For the second study we used information gathered from two countries, and with different tenure, samples limited to professional and academic contacts of the researchers. Future research in other cultural contexts, larger samples, and with other research methods would be useful in order to understand the differences between cultures and countries.

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