

Relational work in Salesperson–Customer interaction

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CA and relational work

- Relationship: “something that is subject to on-going, step-by-step management within talk between persons, rather than a state of affairs that underlies their talk” (Maynard & Zimmerman, 1984)
- Relationship is built through and expressed in communication between the salesperson and the prospective customer
- Our research: Rapport building (Kaski, Niemi, & Pullins, in press) and building customer trust (Niemi, submitted)



First moments (00:00–00:24)

Rapport: "A harmonious relationship between participants; mutual connection and understanding or perceived similarity to one another" (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Clark, Drew, & Pinch, 2003)



First moments (00:00–00:24)

6 Buyer: ei oo ihan opettajan kesälomat mut melekei.
not quite like teacher's summer holidays but almost

7 SP: mutta< e- meleko mukavasti.
but e- quite nice

8 Buyer: on. °on on.°
is. is is ((='that is true'))

9 SP: nii että välillä tota käyvään vähän töissä mutta taas
so that every now and then you'll work a little but then

10 sitte niinku jatketaan.
again like continue.

11 Buyer: taas jatketaan harjoituksia.
again we continue exercises

12 (0.2)

13 SP: eikö seki, siinäki o aina oma homma että nää pääset taas
isn't that too, it too has always its own work to get going

14 kylykeen tähän näi ja,=
with this ((work)) again and

15 Buyer: =o. iha tasan tarkkaa.
=((it)) has. exactly so

16 SP: nii,
yes



formulates her understanding of the C's story and elicits agreement (*nii että* - -, "so that - -")

affiliates with C by adopting his side and supporting his implied affective (emotional) stance (*eikö seki* - -, "isn't that too - -")

Findings

- Sales research has emphasized SP initiated sequences (asking the right questions, initiating small talk, making jokes at appropriate moments, etc.) in rapport building
- Our research suggests that SP's best tool in rapport building are his/her responsive actions
 - *Alignment*: SP not only claims understanding of the C's holiday talk by saying "I see" or "that's right," but aligns with C by continuing his line of action.
 - *Affiliation*: SP affiliates with C by adopting his side and supporting his implied affective (emotional) stance, thereby claiming "sharedness" or "similarity"
 - *Formulations*: By offering a rephrased version of the upshot of the C's story, SP explicitly shows her understanding of the C's story and elicits agreement. This results in an extended sequence of mutual agreement.

Thank you!

Clark, C., Drew, P., & Pinch, T. (2003). Managing prospect affiliation and rapport in real-life sales encounters. *Discourse Studies*, 5(1), 5–31.

Gremler, D., & Gwinner, K. (2008). Rapport-building behaviors used by retail employees. *Journal of Retailing*, 84(3), 308–324.

Maynard, D. W., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1984). Topical talk, ritual and the social organization of relationships. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 47(4), 301–316.

Kaski, T., Niemi, J., & Pullins, E. (in press). Rapport building in authentic B2B sales interaction. *Industrial Marketing Management*.

Niemi, J. (submitted). Building customer trust. A comparison of real-life failed and successful B2B sales encounters. *Journal of Business Research*.