Relational work in Salesperson–Customer interaction

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On-going project: DICIA – Digitalization in Customer Interaction

- 31 video-recorded B-to-B sales encounters
- Customer service chat (5 days)

Customer service chat

10:02:29 --- Leena
Hei Kuinka uoin auttaa?

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10:02:50 --- asiakas
kuinka hinnan laskenta kestää

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10:03:02 --- asiakas
olen odotellut jo reilut 5 min

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10:03:27 --- Leena
Ilmeneesi laskutissamme on jotain hääkkää, koska edellinen asiakas kummitoi asiakas.

23 face-to-face meetings

8 phone calls w. a shared computer screen
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)
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!


