

Personality and communication profiles of salespeople in Finland

Tiina Brandt

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Keywords

Sales, personality, communication style

Abstract

Object of this study is to study the salespeople in Finland. What are their personality types, what kind of communication they are using. Sample was 159 salespeople who filled in personality and communication style questionnaires and who answered to the open questions as well. Results indicate that most of the sales personnel are Extraverted with Thinking or Feeling personality dimensions. In communication situations they regarded their strengths as good ability to read others, ability to control their feelings and use of coaching. Results indicated statistically significant differences with relationship of personality and communication. Differences occurred in Insecure, Avoiding Feelings and Sensitive communication styles. In Insecure style, the most Insecure were Introverted+Thinking in contrast to the least Insecure communicators Extraverted+Feeling. Avoiding Feelings in communication were the highest with Introverted+Thinking. and least avoidant were Extraverted+Thinking. Most Sensitive communicators were Introverted+Feeling and least the opposite Extraverted+Thinking. The results support well Myers-Briggs theory and give new insights into the salespersons' educational needs and strengths and weaknesses in customer discussions.

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Introduction

Already at the 1970s many salespeople improved their relationships with customers by using socially based authority that they have learnt from their superiors (Busch & Wilson, 1976). A crucial component of customer-oriented marketing was that employees who feel more empowered at work emphasize both organizational objectives and customer pleasure (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). Also Martin and Bush (2006) found out that transformational leadership, empowerment, and specific components of the psychological climate are important predictors of customer-oriented selling.

According to Peeker's dissertation (2016) the top-performing salespeople mentioned that having support like mentoring enhanced their selling and they also had lot of engaging with customers. While top-performers mentioned also candidate recruiting, motivation, and rewarding, those were not so frequently highlighted. According to Peeker's study sales leaders focus on mentoring, creating visions, and recruiting candidates, whereas salespeople placed more emphasis on teamwork, client engagement, championing, and challenging. Overall, Peeker concluded that for high-performing sales personnel, receiving coaching and having active interaction with clients are essential.

In addition, for creating favorable conditions for high performance of salespeople, the personality and individual qualities impact on the performance too. Earlier studies indicate that salespeople are toward certain personalities (e.g. Huynh et al., 2020). However, there is no earlier studies about sales personnel and sales work fit. Here we are among the first to study if salespeople's personality impacts for having different preferences for sales situations. Getting more information about interaction preferences with salespeople, can enhance sales when matching clients that suit them better. This study is interested about finding out more about salespeople personality and communication style in Finland.

Personality of salespeople

Most of the earlier research focus on sales performance and personality. According to those, especially Conscientiousness, (Furnham & Fudge, 2008; Huynh et al., 2020; Sjöberg et al., 2005).

Extraversion (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Huynh et al., 2020) and Openness to Experience (Huynh et al., 2020; Furnham & Fudge, 2008) are found to be connected to sales performance. Outside from personality, Sitser et al. (2013) found that Proactivity is related to Achieving Sales results and General job performance. Positive affect, willingness to work and work interest indicated core task performance in sales by Sjöberg et al. (2005).

Indirect impacts of Conscientiousness and Sales have been found by Barrick, Mount and Strauss (1993). They found autonomous goal setting, and to lesser extent goal commitment, to mediate relationships between Conscientiousness and two measures of job proficiency – supervisory ratings of job performance and sales volume for sales representatives. Also, Stewart (1996) found that extraversion was positively correlated with high performance in sales only when performance was explicitly rewarded. According to Barrick et al. (2002) status striving and accomplishment striving (indirectly through status striving) mediate relationships between two FFM personality traits (Conscientiousness and Extraversion) and supervisory ratings of sales performance. Extraverted employees were more likely to be motivated by status striving, which, in turn, enabled them to perform better as sales representatives. Conscientious sales representatives were more likely to strive for accomplishments, which linked to performance through status striving (Barrick et al., 2002).

Methodology

The sample was collected in part of the project PATA (Project focusing on sales and AI: Better customer-interactions with the help of AI). The participants were sent the e-questionnaires during the spring and autumn 2024.

Sample

People working at customer service and sales were focus-group of this study. 73 people were included into this study. 45 were women (61,6%) and 28 men (38,4%). When regarding experience from sales, the most common period was from 1 to 5 years (26%) and from 6 to 10 years (19,2%). Under 1 year experience there was 10 respondents (13,7%) and over 20 years' experience there was 11 respondents (15,1%)

Questionnaires

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

The MBTI was measured with Finnish version of MBTI. It is commonly used in Finnish research (e.g. Brandt & Helander, 2020; Uusi-Kakkuri, 2017). MBTI is based on four preference pairs, which together form sixteen personality types. Preferences are Extraversion-Introversion, Sensing-Intuition, Thinking-Feeling, Judging-Perceiving. Sixteen personality types (e.g. INTP, ESTJ) all have own dynamics and thus each of the types is described differently.

Communication questionnaire

Communication style was measured with 50 items indicating different kinds of communication. Altogether there were 12 factors formed based on the earlier research. Reliable analyses indicated alphas from ,557 (Emphatic) to Prefers Teams (0,80). Alphas were adequate, even with this kind of small sample size. Dimensions were: Emphatic, Impatient, Controlling Feelings, Insecure, Avoiding Feelings, Dominating, Coaching, Ability to Read Others, Sensitive, High Temperament, Eager, Prefers Teams-meetings.

Results

Communication styles of salespeople

As can be seen from Table 1. the most used ways in communication were Reading Others, Controlling Feelings and Coaching. Least salespeople were using Insecure way of communicating and Teams-meetings.

Personality types and communication styles

Due to the amount of data, the statistical analyses cannot be done with all 16 personality types. Thus the connection of the personalities with communication style is done, by using two first dimensions of the personality types: ET, EF, IT, IF. There were 46 salespeople (37%) of Extraverted+Thinking, 39 (37%) of

Extraverted+Feeling, 21 (17%) of Introverted+Thinking and 20 (16%) of Introverted+Feeling. Altogether there were 67% of extraverts. Here are the short presentations of each of four combinations:

- ET: Extraverted+Thinking - Describes personalities with extraverted and thinking orientation. They are people with energy toward outside and interests towards things more than people. They are usually efficient in the world of things.
- EF: Extraverted+Feeling - Describes personalities with extraverted and feeling orientation. Their energy is toward outside, and they are focusing more on the people than things. They are usually naturally emphatic and friendly.
- IT: Introverted+Thinking - Describes personalities with introverted and thinking orientation. They are energized by inner reflection, and they are focusing more on the things than people. They are usually able to focus long time, having good concentration skills.
- IF: Introverted+Feeling - Describes personalities with introverted and feeling orientation. They are energized by inner reflection, and they are focusing more on people than things. They tend to have sensitivity to others needs.

As can be seen in Table 2. there were statistically significant differences in following communication styles: Insecure, Avoiding Feelings, and Sensitive. The highest in the *Insecure style* were Introverted with Thinking preferences, and their opposites Extraverted with Feeling were the least Insecure. In Avoiding Feelings the highest ratings were given by IT-types and lowest ET-types. Most Sensitive were IF-types and least their opposites ET-types.

Table 1. Communication styles (n=159)

Dimension	Mean (std)
Emphatic	5,17 (0,79)
Impatient	4,17 (0,99)
Controlling feelings	5,38 (0,99)
<u>Insecure</u>	<u>2,84 (0,93)</u>
Avoiding Feelings	3,23 (1,03)
Dominating	3,01 (1,09)
Coaching	5,31 (0,82)
Ability to Read Others	5,46 (1,07)
Sensitive	3,47 (1,23)
High Temperament	4,06 (1,43)
Eagerness	5,16 (1,33)
<u>Prefers Teams-meetings</u>	<u>2,92 (1,53)</u>

Table 2. Statistical analysis with Anova about communication style and personality

	Emphatic	Impatient	Control-ling Feelings	Insecure	Avoiding Feelings	Dominant
ET (n=46)	5,18	<u>4,11</u>	5,31	2,73	<u>2,68</u>	3,11
EF (n=39)	5,36	4,20	5,62	<u>2,71</u>	3,02	3,09
IT (n=21)	<u>4,88</u>	4,40	5,43	3,24	3,89	<u>2,92</u>
IF (n=20)	5,31	4,26	<u>5,08</u>	3,18	3,49	3,13
Sig.	0,124	0,697	0,186	0,041*	0,001***	0,915
	Coaching	Ability to Read others	Sensitive	High Temperament	Eagerness	Prefers Teams-meetings
ET (n=46)	5,45	5,71	<u>3,07</u>	<u>3,90</u>	5,36	<u>2,46</u>
EF (n=39)	5,47	5,60	3,32	4,15	5,44	2,82
IT (n=21)	<u>5,01</u>	5,06	3,96	4,35	4,64	3,38
IF (n=20)	5,22	5,56	4,23	4,68	5,25	3,15
Sig.	0,111	0,091	0,001***	0,193	0,100	0,070

Discussion

The salespeople seem to be mainly Extraverted people, with Thinking or Feeling dimension. Extraverted people enjoy conversations and eagerness to communicate is their natural tendency. In many ways the selling is still regarded as very social work (despite digitalization), thus mostly extraverted people approach the sales positions. The less there is time for face-to-face communication, the more important the time spent in communication is. The salespeople regarded themselves good at Reading other people, Controlling their feelings and using Coaching style in their communication.

Extraverted+Thinking types are outward oriented people, with interest of things (more than people). They were giving high ratings to themselves in Ability to Read others, Coaching way of communication and Eagerness to communicate. In modern organizations the coaching is common way of daily communication, and it has been reached also Finnish salespeople. Asking questions also in sales situations gives more insight of clients' needs and gives clients the feeling of being heard. Also ability to read others is important quality in sales. Extraverted+Thinking types regarded lowest the Impatient communication, Avoiding Feelings, Sensitivity, High Temperament and Preferring Teams-meetings. So it seems like ET-types are patient with the customer discussions, they do not avoid talking about feelings, they are not sensitive nor having high temperament and they are preferring discussions face-to-face, not in Teams or Zoom. Thinking personalities are not usually very sensitive, when they are more focusing on the things than people topics. According to these results, it seems like extraverted people dislike more Teams-meetings than introverted, which supports earlier research and theory as well.

Extraverted+Feeling are outside oriented people with empathy. They rated themselves high in Emphatic style, Controlling feelings, Coaching style and Eagerness. Because EF people tend to be interested in other people and communicating with others, these results seem to be very logical. They were lowest in Insecure way of communication, and it may be that when their natural tendency is to approach others and probably practiced that a lot, it can be that they are quite sure about their way of communication.

Introverted+Thinking are reflective personalities with interest of things and objects (not people). Here they rated themselves highest in Impatient, Insecure, Avoiding Feelings, and Preferring Teams meetings. When they are mostly interested things and objects and they like to reflect and work on the things on their own, they may feel themselves restless or insecure when communicating with others. The Teams-meetings are usually short and efficient, and which suits well their communication style. Introverted+Thinking people might feel intimidated when talking about feelings, when it's not their favorite topic, or topic that interests them very much. Introverted+Thinking were rating themselves lowest at Emphatic, Dominant, Coaching, Ability to Read Others, and Eagerness. When interest is on things not people (=thinking personality), and when being introverted the ability to read others is not very well developed. Also low in Emphatic and Eagerness to discuss are reflecting those same preferences.

Introverted+Feeling is interested of people, but only certain amounts of time, because they like to reflect and spend time alone. Some argue that Introverted+Feeling combination is sometimes related to hypersensitivity. Here they had highest ratings on the Sensitivity and High temperament, and lowest in the Controlling feelings, which all can be related to each other. When having intense feelings, they most likely are difficult to hide. Interestingly their Dominant communication style was high with them, so it may be that High Temperament can be seen as Dominance also.

Even though, the sample was quite small, some statistical analysis could be done indicating personality differences in Insecure, Avoiding Feelings and Sensitive communication styles. In Insecure style, the most Insecure were Introverted+Thinking in contrast to the least Insecure communicators Extraverted+Feeling. Avoiding Feelings in communication were the highest with Introverted+Thinking, and least avoidant were Extraverted+Thinking. Most Sensitive communicators were Introverted+Feeling and least the opposite Extraverted+Thinking. The results support well Myers-Briggs theory and give new insights into the salespeople's educational needs and strengths and weaknesses in customer discussions.

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