

SELLER ROLE PERFORMANCE IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS: A FOCUS ON CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Douglas W. LaBahn and Katrin R. Harich, California State University Fullerton
School of Business Administration and Economics
Department of Marketing, Fullerton CA 92634-9480

ABSTRACT

Remarkably little effort has been devoted to understanding cultural sensitivity and its role in international business relationships. The authors draw on existing research and 52 in-depth field interviews with Mexican managers to provide a working definition of seller role performance which includes cultural sensitivity as a key dimension. A conceptual framework is presented that identifies the antecedents and consequences of seller role performance as a guide to future research efforts. Implications for U.S. managers are discussed.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this paper is to delineate the domain of the cultural sensitivity construct, provide an operational definition and embed the construct in a theoretical framework. As developed in this paper, cultural sensitivity is conceptualized as an important dimension of seller role performance. The result is that normative statements about cultural sensitivity can now be operationalized and implemented. To this end, several literature streams and field interviews are integrated to specify the antecedents and consequences of seller role performance. A propositional inventory with seller role performance as the focal construct is presented as a guide for future research.

In addition to advancing theory, the paper outlines the factors managers should consider to increase seller role performance in international business relationships. Specifically, our model has important

implications for the selection and training of international salespeople. The importance of creating an organizational climate that supports the efforts of personnel devoted to building international relationships is recognized.

METHOD

The field research consisted of in-depth telephone interviews with 52 purchasing managers located in Mexico's largest cities. Mexico was chosen because it is the United States' third largest trading partner and a member of the North American Free Trade Agreement (Business Week 1993).

All interviewees were responsible for the importation of products from the United States. Their organizations ranged in size from small privately owned businesses to very large chains with over 1000 employees. Most companies had several stores or field offices.

The personal interviews averaged 45 minutes and ranged from 30 minutes to 90 minutes in duration. All but one respondent agreed to be audiotaped and most managers expressed great enthusiasm for the issues explored.

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