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## A theoretical extension of Toman's sibling position and gender model to industrial selling

### Abstract

Traditionally, salesperson selection studies have focused on predicting sales performance in terms of the salesperson's personality, socioeconomic, and demographic characteristics. Recognizing the need for examining the customer as well as the salesperson-customer interaction, recent researchers have conceptualized and empirically investigated this association. Although extensive social science theory and research have been developed and conducted relative to successful/unsuccessful interpersonal relations, especially similarity/dissimilarity of participants' personalities, most marketing research has focused on the similarity of members' characteristics. The author presents a composite variable that isolates the determinants of successful interactions, thereby permitting more sophisticated analysis of the industrial salesperson-buyer dyad. Labeled family constellation, this concept incorporates family size, birth order, gender, and spacing of children. Instead of concentrating on either similarity/dissimilarity of dyadic individuals' characteristics, the author discusses a model that includes both viewpoints. After conceptually extending this model as well as highlighting successful and unsuccessful relationships, limitations and personal selling implications are presented.

**Keywords:** industrial selling, industrial salesperson-buyer dyads, family constellation, similarity/dissimilarity of dyadic members.

**JEL Classification:** M31.

### Introduction

Salesperson selection studies have traditionally concentrated on forecasting performance, or "sales success", in terms of the salesperson's personality attributes, socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, and various interest and ability factors<sup>1</sup>. While some research efforts have found useful associations, others have not (e.g., Cotham, 1970; Dwyer et al., 1987; McNeilly and Russ, 2000; Frankwick et al., 2001). Several scholars have noted such research fails to consider who the salesperson interacts with in attempting to make a sale<sup>2</sup>. One writer observed,

*The sale is the result of the particular interaction situation, the face-to-face contact of the given salesman and his prospect. The result of the contact depends not on the characteristics of either party alone but how the two parties view and react to each other (Evans, 1964, p. 25).*

Acknowledgement of this theoretical gap in understanding the selling process has propelled recent researchers in the direction of conceptualizing and empirically investigating the salesperson-customer interaction (e.g., Capon et al., 1977; Dwyer et al., 1987; Dwyer et al., 1998; McNeilly and Russ, 2000; Frankwick et al., 2001; Lichtenthal and Tellefsen, 2001).

Although several conceptualizations of salesperson-customer association exist (e.g., Willett and

Pennington, 1966; Bearden, 1969), all share three commonalities that differentiate them from and/or complement the traditional approach (Engel et al., 1973). First, sales outcomes – positive or negative – are a function of the dyadic interaction of a customer and salesperson, not of the individual qualities of either alone. Second, the nature and attributes of the interaction as well as the roles portrayed by salesperson and customer are examined. Finally, more complex variables and relations are employed to ascertain the determinants of successful interactions. Figure 1 summarizes a representative conceptualization of the salesperson-customer interaction.

Several marketing researchers have empirically examined transaction characteristics, interaction determinants of transaction outcomes, salesperson-customer interaction, and salesperson-customer similarity<sup>3</sup>. In this paper, the author will concentrate on the latter two areas – salesperson-customer interaction, and similarity between salesperson and customer. Furthermore, of the intervening variables depicted in Figure 1 that influence customer and salesperson characteristics, family will be the focus of attention.

Social scientists have long been interested theoretically and empirically in areas related to interaction, such as interpersonal relations, theory of complementary needs, and similarity/dissimilarity of participants' attitudes and personalities<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Evans (1963), Gadel (1964), Mayer and Greenburg (1964), Brock (1965), Tosi (1966), Baehr and Williams (1968), Cotham (1968), Tanofsky et al. (1969), Cotham (1970), Scheibelhot and Albaum (1973), Capon et al. (1977), and Dwyer et al. (1987).

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Evans (1963), Evans (1964), Cotham (1970), Davis and Silk (1971), Capon et al. (1977), Dwyer et al. (1987), Dwyer et al. (1998), McNeilly and Russ (2000), and Frankwick et al. (2001).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Woodside and Davenport (1974), Churchill et al. (1975), Riordan et al. (1977), Weitz (1981), Crosby et al. (1990), Palmer and Bejou (1995), Churchill et al. (1997), Dwyer et al. (1998), Jones et al. (1998), Kang and Hillery (1998), Smith (1998), McNeilly and Russ (2000), and McColl and Truong (2013).

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Thibaut and Kelley (1959), Heider (1961), Homans (1961), Berscheid and Walster (1969), Byrne (1971), Berscheid and Walster (1978), Byrne et al. (1986), Ibarra (1992), and Graves and Powell (1995).

While numerous marketing and personal selling studies have focused on interpersonal associations and dyads, most have dealt primarily with the similarity of members' characteristics<sup>1</sup>.

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to present another complex variable that will be useful in isolating the determinants of successful relationships. This composite variable will also permit more sophisticated investigation of the roles portrayed by the industrial salesperson and buyer in a dyadic exchange. This variable is labelled family constellation. It incorporates family size, birth order, gender, and spacing of children. Finally, instead of concentrating on either similarity or dissimilarity of personality characteristics between dyad participants, the author will discuss a model that includes both viewpoints.

In accomplishing this purpose, the author will briefly review the literature on interpersonal relations, especially studies dealing with salesperson-customer similarity/dissimilarity and interaction as well as examine the importance of family constellation in personality and behavior development. Next, general characteristics appropriate for each possible sibling gender and age rank within the family will be summarized. All potential combinations of salesperson and customer according to sibling gender and age rank will then be developed. Probable successful and unsuccessful interactions will be highlighted. Finally, limitations and personal selling implications of applying family constellation to the industrial salesperson-buyer dyad will be discussed.

## 2. Selected literature review

This section includes a selected literature review of interpersonal relations and family constellation.

**2.1. Interpersonal relations.** The phenomenon of interpersonal (or dyadic) relations has been extensively investigated by social scientists at both theoretical and empirical levels. A question commonly addressed by these researchers concerns what determines a successful association between individuals. One school of inquiry, which is supported by a relatively large body of evidence, maintains a successful association is partially a function of how "similar" the participants are. However, another philosophy, which is substantiated by some research, purports "dissimilarity" between individuals tends to result in a favorable interaction<sup>2</sup>.

**2.1.1. Salesperson-customer similarity and interaction.** Basically, the "similarity" hypothesis states that the "formation of interpersonal relationships ... [will] be facilitated when two individuals hold [similar] opinions ..." (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959, p. 43), values, and philosophies. In addition to numerous studies by social scientists, several marketing researchers have found empirical support for this notion. Lombard (1955) determined similar values between customers and retail salesgirls lead to persistent and continued behavior patterns. Investigating life insurance salespeople and customers, Evans (1963) discovered similarity of physical, demographic, and affiliate attributes within these dyads increased the likelihood of a sale. Tosi (1966) concluded similarity of expectations between wholesale drug salesmen and retail pharmacists usually resulted in successful interactions. Gadel (1964) found age to be the only similar variable between life insurance policy holders and agents. Examining the relative importance of salesperson expertise and customer-salesperson similarity in the paint department of a retail store, Brock (1965) ascertained similarity was more important than expertise. Riordan, Oliver, and Donnelly (1977) determined greater attitudinal similarity between life insurance agents and customers than between agents and unsold prospects. In a study of financial advisors and clients, Palmer and Bejou (1995) concluded some aspects of relationship development may be significantly dependent on the gender of both buyer and seller. Dwyer, Richard, and Shepherd (1998) found gender and age of life insurance salespeople were significantly associated with those of their customers. Kang and Hillery (1998) discovered older customers had more favorable attitudes toward older retail clothing salespeople than their younger counterparts. Smith (1998) ascertained similarity among purchasing agents and salespeople in terms of gender and life stage were positively related to the relationship quality of the buyer-seller dyad. Other researchers have uncovered a significant relationship between salesperson-customer similarity and sales performance (e.g., Woodside and Davenport, 1974; Capon, 1975; Churchill et al., 1975; Busch and Wilson, 1976; Crosby et al., 1990).

**2.1.2. Salesperson-customer dissimilarity and interaction.** With the "dissimilarity" theory, dyad formation will be facilitated when two individuals possess different opinions, values, and philosophies as well as "when the differences are such that each person can provide something the other one needs" (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959, p. 45). In this sense, "two apparently dissimilar entities may ... be considered ... complementary ... when they lead toward a common purpose" (Heider, 1961, p. 186). Beyond social science research, only a few marketing studies have

<sup>1</sup> For example, see Woodside and Davenport (1974), Churchill et al. (1975), Crosby et al. (1990), Palmer and Bejou (1995), Dwyer et al. (1998), Jones et al. (1998), Smith (1998), McNeilly and Russ (2000), and McColl and Truong (2013).

<sup>2</sup> For excellent reviews of early theory and research in both areas, refer to Thibaut and Kelley (1959), Heider (1961), Homans (1961), and Berscheid and Walster (1969).

substantiated the “dissimilarity” (or complementary) hypothesis. Investigating the retail clothing environment, Kang and Hillery (1998) determined younger customers had more favorable attitudes toward older salespeople than younger ones, because older salespeople showed more interest in helping them and were more likely to provide information. Dwyer, Richard, and Shepherd (1998) tested age and gender similarity of life insurance salespeople and customers. No difference in performance between either age-matched pairs of salespeople and customers or mismatched ones was found. However, they discovered gender-mismatched salesperson-customer dyads outperformed matched ones. Using a web-video sales encounter, McColl and Truong (2013) concluded dyad gender mismatching resulted in higher customer satisfaction scores for an attractive salesperson. Other researchers have uncovered either limited or no support for the positive influence of buyer-seller similarity on sales performance (e.g., Riordan et al., 1977; Jones et al., 1998).

**2.2. Family constellation.** Individuals tend to perceive new situations in terms of historically similar instances. Their experiences and attitudes are generalized (or transferred) from the past to present situations. In the words of one researcher,

*Since family contexts are among an individual's oldest, ... most regularly effective, longest-lasting contexts stemming from the individual's earliest years, ... generalizations and transferences from them to new social situations are likely to have occurred more often and ... influenced the perception and ... shaping of contemporary life contexts more strongly than those life contexts ... experienced only later in ... life* (Berscheid and Walster, 1969, p. 77).

Hence, the types of individuals one has lived with most closely and longest will partially determine the types of individuals selected as future friends, companions, spouses, etc. New associations, therefore, tend to duplicate old ones. In general, “the more complete the duplication, the greater the chance that the relationship will last and be happy” (Toman, 1970, p. 45).

One way for ascertaining when a new relationship is similar to an earlier relationship is to examine the position that each member in the association had in his/her original family. This position can be characterized by the individual's age rank among his/her siblings and by the gender distribution among them. Toman maintains it is possible to describe a person's major personality characteristics and those of his/her friends, the likelihood of stability in marriage, what he/she is like at work, and his/her philosophy on the basis of only two

facts: gender and age rankings of siblings in the person's family (Toman, 1976).

Following systematic research of more than 3,000 German families, Toman confirmed the predictive ability of his model. On the basis of these findings, he developed ten portraits of basic gender and sibling positions (Toman, 1976). Table 1 summarizes the descriptions of long-term social behavior, attitudes, interests, and social preferences for each of ten sibling positions.

By cross-tabulating these sibling positions according to gender and age ranks, Toman (1976) arrived at sixteen types of parental couples. Although Toman did not include “onlys” in this treatment, he did comment briefly on their impact (Toman, 1976, pp. 229-232). Table 2 depicts Toman's discussion of each parental couple in terms of the expected degree of favorability of the relationship, which is a function of possible age rank and/or gender conflicts between the participants. In a rank conflict, “the partners ... have had similar or identical age ranks in their respective original families”. Since neither individual is used to the age rank of the other, they will demand that age rank for themselves in their association. With a gender conflict, “a partner has had no siblings of the opposite sex in his original family”. Such an individual will have difficulty getting used to a partner of the opposite gender in any interaction. “Rank conflicts as well as sex conflicts are examples of non-complementary relationships” (Toman, 1976, p. 85). Table 3 provides a convenient summary of Toman's sixteen parental couples and anticipated level of favorability of each relationship.

### 3. Possible salesperson-customer dyads according to sibling gender and age rank

Most retail selling involves a one-time salesperson-customer encounter. Toman's model would probably not apply to such brief interactions. Industrial selling, on the other hand, is “developmental in nature, requiring a period of months or even years to culminate in a firm order” (Capon et al., 1977, p. 329). Relationships between business buyers and salespeople “frequently involve long preliminary periods of assessment and protracted periods of fulfillment” (Wilson, 1995, p. 336). In this situation, where a relatively long-term relationship similar to marriage exists, the major aspects of Toman's theory would more likely generalize to industrial selling.

Before applying Toman's model, several adjustments are necessary. First, salespersons can be either male or female. Therefore, sibling positions corresponding to the “female” and “male” categories in Table 3 must be combined to form one salesperson dimension. Second, customers can be either male or

female. Hence, the sibling positions corresponding to salespersons are duplicated for customers. Finally, “onlys” in terms of male and female are added to each dimension. The end result is a 10 x 10 table that cross-classifies customer sibling positions with salesperson sibling positions. Table 4 summarizes the degree of complementarity and favorability regarding various salesperson-customer interactions.

**3.1. Successful and unsuccessful interactions.** In the remainder of this section, potentially successful salesperson-customer interactions will be distinguished from those that would probably be unsuccessful. Specifically, three different degrees of favorability of interaction will be delineated: favorable, moderately favorable, and unfavorable. “Favorable” associations are characterized by either no rank and no gender conflicts or partial gender conflict. “Moderately favorable” relationships consist of either rank or gender conflict, but not both. In terms of their psychological significance, favorable and moderately favorable interactions may be perceived as complementary relationships. “Unfavorable” interactions, on the other hand, are symbolized by either rank and partial gender conflicts or rank and gender conflicts. Hence, these associations may be viewed as noncomplementary (or similar) (Toman, 1976). Each of the 100 possible salesperson-customer dyads will be segregated under one of these three categories.

*3.1.1. Favorable interactions.* Generalizing Toman’s work (Tables 2 and 3), the following six salesperson-customer dyads should result in relatively good or complementary relationships, because the individuals complement one another: OBS-YSB, OBS-YSS, OBB-YSB, YBS-OSB, YBS-OSS, and YBB-OSB. In all six cases, mutual understanding generally exists between the parties. However, in the first three cases, the salesperson sets the tone of the relationship, because he was the “older” sibling in his original family. As a result, the salesperson can be friendly and tolerant while the customer is submissive (OBS-YSB). Or, he may be tough and self-righteous, but the customer is used to this and therefore knows how to deal with such a salesman (OBB-YSB). In another instance, the salesman will have to inconspicuously establish the tone of the interaction. If he does not, the customer will become stubborn, insistent, and oppose him. Fortunately, such a potential dilemma will not last long (OBS-YSS).

With the last three dyads, the customer assumes the leadership position in the interaction, because she was the “oldest” sibling in her original family. The salesman, acting out his role of the “younger” sibling, generally submits to the customer’s will (YBS-OSB). In another case, the salesman may not like the customer’s highly authoritarian behavior, but he does not contest the customer’s leadership

(YBS-OSS). Also, the customer may treat the salesman in a motherly way, but he accepts this guardianship and nurturance since it is tolerant and friendly rather than possessive (YBB-OSB).

By switching the order of the members of each dyad from salesperson-customer to customer-salesperson, the corresponding symmetrical interactions are obtained (Table 4). While this exchange does not affect the favorability of these interactions, the results of each dyad are reversed. For example, with the three customer-salesperson dyads of YBS-OSB, YBS-OSS, and YBB-OSB, the saleswoman sets the leadership and authoritative tone of the relationship, and the customer generally consents. In fact, he seeks the advice, understanding and encouragement of the saleswoman in a motherly fashion. This complementary association occurs because the saleswoman and customer were indoctrinated as “older” and “younger” siblings, respectively, in their family experiences. However, in the cases of OBS-YSB, OBS-YSS, and OBB-YSB, the saleswoman is subservient to the customer’s domineering and authoritative personality.

*3.1.2. Moderately favorable interactions.* From Toman’s model (Tables 2 and 3), two salesperson-customer interactions result in moderately favorable or complementary relationships: OBB-YSS and YBB-OSS<sup>1</sup>. While mutual understanding exists between the individuals, it is not as positive as in the previous section. Indeed, some tension may prevail; however, it does not sabotage the relationship.

In the first case (OBB-YSS), as a result of his “older” sibling orientation, the salesperson establishes the leadership tone of the interaction. Because of her “younger” sibling position, the customer may act impulsively and accept the salesman’s leadership. In order to assert herself, the customer sometimes reacts negatively to the salesman’s role. This relationship is apt to remain tense for a long time.

With the last dyad (YBB-OSS), neither person has experienced a sibling of the opposite gender in their original family. As a consequence of her “older” sibling education, the customer assumes command of the interaction. The salesman, reacting according to his “younger” sibling up-bringing, submits to her authority. However, he secretly opposes the customer’s leadership, and the relationship is not a relaxed or contented one.

By switching the order of the members of each dyad from salesperson-customer to customer-salesperson, the corresponding symmetrical interactions are obtained (Table 4). While this exchange does not

<sup>1</sup> Although Toman categorized OBS-OSB and YBS-YSB dyads as moderately favorable interactions, the author classified them as unfavorable, because age rank conflicts are substantial.

affect the favorability of these interactions, the results of each dyad are reversed. But, both situations will remain tense and unhappy for a relatively long period of time. With the YBB-OSS dyad, the saleswoman is the responsible leader in all matters affecting the relationship. The customer submits, but he secretly opposes the saleswoman. However, in the case of the OBB-YSS relationship, the customer assumes command of the interaction while the saleswoman willingly accepts his direction. Occasionally, she will react negatively toward the customer.

In the author's expanded version of Toman's model (Table 4), sixteen additional salesperson-customer interactions and their corresponding inverses will probably result in moderately favorable relationships. Referring to Table 2, these dyads can be categorized into the following sub-groups:

- a. Demanding leader-willing follower (OBB-YBB, OBB-OF, OSS-YSS, OSS-OM, OBB-OM, and OSS-OF). The salesperson, as a result of his/her "older" sibling orientation and inexperience with an opposite gender sibling, is a responsible individual and earnestly seeks the leadership and authority role. He/she likes to take control of the relationship, give orders, and provide direction. Because of his/her "younger" or "only" sibling education, the customer desires an "older" salesperson that can fulfill the paternal/maternal capacity of protection, dominance, and leadership. He/she likes the relationship structured this way.
- b. Unwilling leader-willing follower (OBS-OF, OBS-YBB, OBS-OM, OSB-YSS, OSB-OM, and OSB-OF). The salesperson is not only an "older" sibling, but he/she has had experience with an opposite gender sibling. Consequently, he/she is not as obsessed with authoritative power as the "demanding" leader. The latent desire to lead is present, and will become manifest when the "younger" or "only" sibling customer demands direction. But the salesperson will not assume an authoritarian mentality. Instead, he/she lends guidance in a reasonable, friendly, and open manner.
- c. Unwilling leader-unwilling follower (OSB-YSB and OBS-YBS). While the "younger" customer with opposite gender sibling experience desires direction and is submissive, he/she is not subservient. The interaction will be moderately favorable, because the salesperson, as a result of his/her "older" and opposite gender sibling experience, assumes the leadership position of the encounter in an unobtrusive manner.
- d. Demanding leader-unwilling follower (OSS-YSB and OBB-YBS). Because of his/her orientation as an "older" sibling and inexperience with a sibling

of the opposite gender, the salesperson will demand the leadership role of the dyad. The customer with his/her "younger" and opposite gender sibling training seeks direction, but he/she does not like to take orders or to be pushed. Hence, for the relationship to be somewhat successful, the salesperson must provide guidance in a subtle manner.

*3.1.3. Unfavorable interactions.* Evaluation of Toman's research (Tables 2 and 3) reveals that six salesperson-customer interactions generally lead to unfavorable relationships, because the individuals are similar in terms of personalities: OBS-OSS, OBB-OSB, OBB-OSS, YBS-YSS, YBB-YSB, and YBB-YSS. In the first three cases, both salesman and customer are used to leading others, being the authority, and bearing responsibility. The salesman can be more insistent, rigid, and stricter member of the dyad. Although the customer may offer advice, the salesman will become annoyed by this display of tolerance (OBB-OSB). The opposite result will occur in the OBS-OSS interaction. Being a more sympathetic and tolerant authority, the salesman will offer advice. However, the customer's pride and independence will get in the way. She feels nobody can tell her anything. The ultimate conflicting relationship is the OBB-OSS dyad. Both members lay claim to leadership and expect the other individual to submit. But, by their very nature, neither can do this.

The last three salesperson-customer dyads (YBS-YSS, YBB-YSB, and YBB-YSS) share this common attribute: each party expects leadership, guidance, nurturance, care, and responsibility from the other. But, by their personality, neither can assume this role. As a result, both individuals seek the assistance of an outside, third party in fulfilling these needs.

By switching the order of the members of each dyad from salesperson-customer to customer-salesperson, the corresponding symmetrical interactions are obtained (Table 4). While this exchange does not affect the favorability of these interactions, the results of each dyad are reversed. Four of the six customer-salesperson dyads retain the same conclusions (YBS-YSS, YBB-YSB, YBB-YSS, and OBB-OSS). Although dominance, independence, authoritarianism, and responsibility characterize both members of the remaining customer-salesperson dyads (OBS-OSS and OBB-OSB), the results differ. With an OBS-OSS interaction, the customer is more demanding and rigid than the salesperson. She will tend to ignore any advice offered by the salesperson. But, in the case of an OBB-OSB customer-salesperson relationship, the salesperson will be annoyed when the customer offers advice. The salesperson tends to be more insistent, and views the customer as too maternal and tolerant.

Evaluating the author's extension of Toman's theory (Table 4), twenty-five additional salesperson-customer dyads and their respective inverses will likely result in unfavorable interactions. These relationships can be categorized according to reasons why they will probably be unsuccessful.

- a. Both parties' needs to dominant, lead, and be responsible will clash (OBB-OBS, OBB-OBB, OBS-OBS, OBS-OSB, OSB-OSB, OSB-OSS, and OSS-OSS).
- b. Each individual expects the other person to provide leadership. Yet, as a consequence of their similar personalities, neither is capable of assuming this role. Each requires understanding, but feels he/she is inadequately understood. Hence, both members' dependence and nurturance needs will be thwarted (YBB-YBB, YBB-YBS, YBB-OM, YBB-OF, YBS-YBS, YBS-YSB, YBS-OM, YBS-OF, YSB-OM, YSB-OF, YSS-OM, YSS-OF, OM-OM, OM-OF, OF-OF, YSB-YSB, YSB-YSS, and YSS-YSS).

#### 4. Limitations

Before discussing personal selling implications of Toman's model and the author's extension, several limitations deserve attention.

The ten portraits developed by Toman (Table 1) are most applicable to highly industrialized or developed nations, urban populations, and societies where the family represents the primary early educational medium. Furthermore, it is presumed that one parent financially supports the family while the other stays home and takes care of the children, parents have an average age distance between each other themselves and their children, and no unusual circumstances arise (e.g., early death of one parent, divorce, and debilitating disease) (Toman, 1976). A change in one or several of these variables is likely to have a significant impact upon Toman's model.

The sixteen types of parental couples and ten portraits were derived from extensive research of over 3,000 German families. Although Germany and the United States are highly industrialized countries, the fact that the two cultures differ may hamper the generalization of Toman's theory to American families.

The portraits do not distinguish between an individual who has several siblings of the same gender and an individual who has only one sibling of that gender. However, Toman mentions his characterizations do apply to cases where an individual has three siblings of the same gender. Although Toman focuses on only two siblings per portrait, he does present several guidelines for interpreting multiple and middle sibling positions (Toman, 1976).

Toman's model concentrates on only age rank and gender distribution of the family. While several variables are addressed implicitly (e.g., family size and age spacing of children), family constellation researchers generally ignore such important confounding variables as socioeconomic status, education level attained, religion, nationality, geography, and sibling position of parents.

The author's extension of Toman's model probably applies best to those companies with large, dedicated salesforces than those who rely solely upon manufacturers' representatives. Having a large, dedicated salesforce provides the sales manager greater flexibility (and control) in assigning the "appropriate" salesperson to each customer as recommended by the author's extension. Managers in small-sized firms, however, do not have this kind of flexibility.

Finally, it may be questionable whether an industrial selling relationship between salesperson and buyer approximates a marriage association, which is the foundation of the author's extension. Few salespeople and business customers interact face-to-face on a daily basis. The expected duration of any selling relationship is a function of the selling task required and the technical sophistication of the product involved (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Given an extensive selling task and a highly technical product, it is likely that a "close" relationship would evolve between an industrial salesperson and buyer. Specific instances where the author's extension of Toman's model would probably apply include "new task buying"<sup>1</sup>, high-priced durable goods, complex services, and substantial dollar orders.

#### 5. Personal selling implications

Having developed all possible combinations of salesperson and customer according to sibling gender and age rank, highlighted the probable successful and unsuccessful relationships, and presented limitations, some personal selling implications of the author's extension of Toman's model will be discussed.

The ten portraits summarized in Table 1 make it tempting to determine which individuals would be successful salespersons. But this is the identical problem encountered in traditional salesperson selection studies. Neither the customer nor the interaction itself is considered. This is why the author presented and extended Toman's model. This also explains why the following implications focus on the industrial salesperson-buyer interaction instead of one of the separate entities.

<sup>1</sup> In this situation, the buyer invests a large amount of time and effort to form a well-reasoned judgment (e.g., Hutt and Speh, 1998; Anderson and Narus, 1999).

**5.1. Selection of salespeople.** After segmenting its product-market and determining which market segments to target, the firm will ascertain the sibling position in terms of gender and age rank that represents the majority of customers in each segment<sup>1</sup>. Then, depending upon whether the firm embraces the “similarity” or “dissimilarity” (or complementarity) theory, it can use Table 4 as a guideline for selecting the most appropriate salesperson for each target market. Some degree of latitude exists in this process, because each possible customer sibling position corresponds to at least four suggested salesperson types. For example, under the “complementarity” theory, if the customer is an OSS, then Table 4 recommends that one of these six salespersons be selected and recruited: YBB, YBS, YSB, YSS, OM, or OF. After ascertaining the gender and age rank of each salesperson, the firm can follow a similar procedure for existing target markets. By identifying unfavorable salesperson-customer dyads in each target market, the firm can determine whether to redeploy these salespeople, provide additional training, or assign a mentor. This, in conjunction with Table 4, will assist the firm in determining what type of salesperson it needs for each existing target market, and how many.

**5.2. Training of salespeople.** As part of its sales training program, the firm should consider including the author’s extension of Toman’s model (Table 4) along with Tables 1 and 2. This will provide new salespersons invaluable insight into their personalities and that of potential customers. As a result, this information will increase new salespersons’ understanding of why certain relationships possess a higher probability of success than others. For more experienced salespersons, the author’s extension of Toman’s model could serve as a guideline for retraining those who were willing to assume roles predicted to lead to unfavorable interactions. By making these salespeople cognizant of the potential personality differences (or similarities) between dyadic members, this will increase their awareness, permit them to develop appropriate sales strategies, and improve their chances for achieving successful interactions (Smith, 1998).

**5.3. Assignment of sales managers to salespeople.** In its initial assignment of sales managers to salespeople, top management should consider the implications of family constellation. Studies have consistently shown that gender differences between sales managers and salespeople tend to result in greater stress, lower performance, and less commitment to the organization among salespeople (e.g.,

Futrell, 1984; Tsui and O’Reilly, 1989; Comer et al., 1995; Comer et al., 1998; McNeilly and Russ, 2000; Piercy et al., 2001). Therefore, where possible, top management should avoid assigning sales managers to salespeople that will create gender and/or age rank conflicts. By doing so, top management will increase the likelihood of favorable relationships developing between sales managers and salespeople. This, in turn, will improve salespeople’s attitudes toward their jobs, have a positive impact upon salespeople’s job performance, and increase retention of salespeople.

**5.4. Deployment of salespeople.** Most social science theories embodying a “similarity/dissimilarity” theme apply to instances where each individual can voluntarily select the person with whom he/she wants to interact. It is not a “forced-choice” situation. However, in industrial selling, sales managers assign salespeople to customers and/or geographical territories. In addition, industrial selling is characterized by prearranged and periodic sales interactions. As a result of this lead time, by consulting Table 4, the sales manager can more effectively deploy his/her salespersons. If possible, the sales manager should assign “new” salespeople to potential customers where no gender and/or age rank conflicts exist, “until relationship management skills are honed” (Smith, 1998, p. 16). But, in the case of potential gender and/or age rank conflicts, the sales manager should assign such customers to experienced salespeople, who are more capable of handling such situations. In doing so, the sales manager will maximize the likelihood of increasing the aggregate number of successful new relationships.

**5.5. Repositioning of salespeople.** Continual feedback concerning customer changes is required if favorability is to be maintained within the salesperson-customer dyad. For example, if an OBB customer replaces a YBB customer, then the proper adjustment following the “complementarity” theory is for the sales manager to substitute the “older” sibling salesperson (e.g., OBB, OBS, OSB, or OSS) with either a “younger” sibling (e.g., YBB, YBS, YSB, or YSS) or “only” child (e.g., OM or OF) salesperson. In this way, gender and/or age rank conflicts that characterize interactions involving two “older” or “younger” children will be averted. However, if the sales manager does not have the flexibility to do so, or the client firm insists on keeping the same salesperson, then the manager has no option but to maintain the status quo.

**5.6. Supervision of salespeople.** The author’s extension of Toman’s model (Table 4) along with Tables 1 and 2 will help the sales manager to acquire a better understanding of the particular personalities of salespeople and customers as well as the interaction between these two groups. With prior knowledge as to the likelihood of success of

<sup>1</sup> If there is not a majority of one sibling position in some target market, the firm could deploy two (or more) different sibling-type salespersons, assuming the segment is of sufficient size and the firm possesses adequate resources.



possible dyads, the sales manager will be able to perform his/her duties and responsibilities more effectively and efficiently. For example, salespersons possessing “younger” sibling positions will require more direction and assistance than their “older” sibling counterparts if their interactions with customers are to have any degree of success. However, if there is a gender and/or age rank conflict between the sales manager and a salesperson (e.g., a “new” salesperson or one who has little office contact), an alternative to requiring more interaction between these parties could be a mentoring system, which many companies employ. According to two researchers.

*Finding mentors for outside sales reps who have little office contact ... may be quite desirable when supervisors and subordinates are sufficiently dissimilar, and quite a bit more desirable than requiring unnecessary interaction between ... [them]. A mentoring program can permit self-selection and provide a communication channel without the direct authority involved in the sales manager-rep dyad (McNeilly and Russ, 2000, p. 286).*

**5.7. Motivation of salespeople.** By knowing the personality of each member of the salesforce, as outlined in Table 1, the sales manager will be better able to determine the best method for motivating each salesperson to attain his/her full potential. This, in turn, will benefit the company in terms of increased sales and reduced turnover among its salesforce. Studies in personal selling have shown if sales managers interact more frequently with their salespeople, the attitudes of salespersons toward their jobs will become more positive, performance will increase, and employee turnover will decrease (e.g., Russ, McNeilly, and Comer, 1996; McNeilly and Russ, 2000).

**5.8. Enlightenment of sales managers.** By replacing “Customer” with “Sales Manager” in Table 4, the sales manager will glean new insights into his/her relationship with each salesperson. That is, after evaluating the presence (or lack) of gender and/or age rank conflicts in each dyad, the sales manager will acquire a better understanding of why each salesperson responds to him/her the way he/she does, and vice versa. This will allow the sales manager to develop and implement the appropriate strategies to improve his/her relationship with each salesperson. This, in turn, should result in an improvement in the attitudes of both sales managers and salespeople toward their jobs, increase their performance, and reduce turnover.

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## Summary and conclusion

Any variable that assists in isolating the determinants of successful relationships and provides insight into participants’ personalities is important for companies and sales managers to consider, especially in industrial salesperson-customer dyads. One such variable is family constellation, which incorporates gender and age rankings of siblings. On the basis of these two facts, Toman was able to describe the major personality characteristics of individuals, and forecast the favorability of spousal relationships. Subsequent research confirmed the predictive ability of his model. This led Toman to develop ten portraits of gender and sibling positions. By cross-tabulating these portraits according to gender and age rankings of siblings, Toman arrived at sixteen types of parental couples, which varied in terms of gender and/or age rank conflicts as well as degree of favorability.

In this paper, the author extended Toman’s model by developing all possible combinations of industrial salespersons and customers according to gender and age rankings of siblings. Potentially favorable and moderately favorable salesperson-buyer dyads were distinguished from those likely to be unfavorable. When used in conjunction with other variables, the author’s extension of Toman’s model will assist firms in: (1) Selecting suitable salespeople for each target market, given customers’ sibling positions in terms of gender and age rank; (2) Training salespeople, as it will provide salespeople an invaluable perspective into their personalities and that of customers; and (3) Assigning sales managers to salespeople, so as to mitigate gender and/or age rank conflicts. In addition, the author’s extension of Toman’s model will afford sales managers additional insight into the appropriate deployment, repositioning, supervision, and motivation of salespeople. Finally, by replacing “Customer” with “Sales Manager” in Table 4, sales managers will glean a new understanding of their interactions with salespeople, thereby permitting them to develop and implement the necessary strategies to enhance these relationships. This, in turn, should result in an improvement in the attitudes of both industrial salespeople and sales managers, increase their performance, and reduce turnover as well as create more satisfied buyers, thereby increasing customer retention.

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**Appendices**

Table 1. Ten basic types of gender and sibling positions characterized according to behavior, attitudes, and interest preferences<sup>a</sup>

Sibling position	Behavior, attitudes and interest preferences
Oldest Brother of Brothers (OBB)	Loves to lead and assume responsibility to the point of bossing others. Demands loyalty and trust. Thinks he knows what is best. Can inspire and lead others competently. Good worker. Reliable. Undertakes great hardships. Gets along well with younger men. Aggressive and assertive. In control most times. Dislikes dependence on another person. Believes in strong leadership. Aspires for dictatorial powers. Can be tough and cruel. Cannot accept others' criticism. A perfectionist. Likes clean facts and tight concepts. Obsessed with possessions. Requires order and discipline. Has realistic goals that can be reached by hard work. Foresees what should be done; inquires about consequences. Sensitive and shy with women. Women must be obedient, respectful, and efficient. Treats women like men, but wants a woman who will mother him inconspicuously.
Youngest Brother of Brothers (YBB)	Leans on others. Seeks appreciation, respect, and understanding. Does not want to be a leader. Accepts authority. Can be daring and imaginative. Annoying and irritating. Needs superiors to tell him what to do. Can make sacrifices. Lacks stability and insight. More easily discouraged by failure than others. If successful, overestimates his powers and chances. Volatile, impulsive, ambitious, and obstinate. Material things are unimportant. Prefers present joys. Lives beyond his means. Pursues talents with more commitment than others. Does not like routine. Purposes are meaningless. Soft and yielding with women; they give him more than he wants.
Oldest Brother of Sisters (OBS)	Appreciates ladies. Does not seek leadership, but will do it if called upon; not a dictator. Likes to work, but only as a means to an end. Willing to take risks, and fight for a purpose. Acknowledges professional authority, but bristles at unfounded authoritarianism. Is a realist. Takes care of property, but is not obsessed with it. Less likely to be affected by fashion, prestige, colleagues, or friends.
Youngest Brother of Sisters (YBS)	Ladies love him, and are anxious to take care of him. At work, does whatever he likes, and at his own speed. Not regular worker. Does not like orders. Only personal interests are important. Leaves details to others. His ambition is harder to arouse than others. Can assume responsibilities of leadership with others' help. Males do not like his using women to do his work. Can accomplish much if motherly type is available. Property and wealth are not important. Not worried where money comes from.
Male Only (OM)	Wants to be loved, supported, and helped by as well as work under older people (including persons in authority) more so than other sibling positions. Feels what he does is more important than what others do. Prefers women who will mother him, and subordinate their interests to his. With proper guidance, may rise to great heights in profession. Pursues interests in stable and objective way. Not concerned with material wealth. Takes everything bestowed on him by others for granted.
Oldest Sister of Sisters (OSS)	Likes to take care of things and give orders; otherwise, unhappy and angry. Wants to know what is going on. Wants people to report to her. Derives claim to leadership from another person, usually older man with authority; she accepts his wishes unquestioningly. Good worker when in leadership role. Responsible and competent. Works to maintain her power; expects submission. Can work hard for a cause. Tends to over-exert self. Tough, dominant, assertive, and bossy. Expects subordinates to fulfill assignments; they dread her. Does not understand why others fear her. Self-confident and independent. Feels she is an expert on all topics. Pretends to be surer of self than she really is. Material wealth is less important than responsibility and power over others. Appears efficient, strict, and straightforward to men, which discourages them from making advances. Stays tied to her father more strongly than other women.

Table 1 (cont.). Ten basic types of gender and sibling positions characterized according to behavior, attitudes, and interest preferences<sup>a</sup>

Sibling position	Behavior, attitudes and interest preferences
Youngest Sister of Sisters (YSS)	Loves change, excitement, and adventure. Vivacious, impulsive, and erratic. Her mind can be changed, if manipulation goes unnoticed; otherwise, can be very stubborn. Loves to excel at work. Recognition, praise, and prestige are important. Needs guidance from another, but this cannot be obvious. Success makes her more exuberant than others, but failure also discourages her more, unless someone comforts her. Will work hard if someone believes in her. More suggestible than other women. Willing to take great risks. Capricious, willful, pretentious, moody, and emotional. Material goods may be important, but she is not consistent. She can amass things, but also be wasteful. She can attract men better than others, and likes to do so; but, she may compete with them.
Oldest Sister of Brothers (OSB)	Independent and strong in an unobtrusive way. Loves to take care of men without requiring recognition. Treats men as little boys. Likes to appear superior in her work. Does not over-exert self, yet does not avoid things. Creates atmosphere coworkers appreciate. Reasonable, responsible, friendly, and practical. Does not compete with men. Often acts as mediator in disputes between others. Pretends to be more optimistic than others. Cannot bear solitude. Disappointments rarely discourage her. Has healthy egotism. Relates easily to men who are more important to her than material possessions. Men often take her for granted.
Youngest Sister of Brothers (YSB)	Without trying, she attracts men more pervasively than other women. Gets what she wants from men. Does not develop special talents. Not ambitious, but can become so for a man. Disappointments do not discourage her. At work, she is not bent on realizing her own goals. If under someone's guidance, tends to be good employee. Submissive; but not subservient. Sometimes extravagant, spoiled, and selfish. More than other females, guided by feelings and instincts. Women do not like her. Feminine, friendly, kind, and sensitive. Possessions mean little to her; will forsake all for her man. Men admire and love her.
Female Only (OF)	Spoiled and egocentric. Can be more heartless and extravagant than other females. Requires more care, attention, and direction from older persons at work and in daily life than other females. Impresses others as a do-gooder with claim for preferential treatment. Can apply self and get involved. Occasionally, devotion to her superiors is lacking. Feels parents owe her help and support, even after becoming an adult and entering a profession. Unswerving older patron is more important than material wealth.

Source: <sup>a</sup>Adapted from Toman (1976, pp. 143-188).

Table 2. Sixteen parental couples classified by sibling position, gender and age rank conflicts, and degree of favorability of their association<sup>a</sup>

Father	Mother	Results
Oldest Brother of Sisters (OBS)	Youngest Sister of Brothers (YSB)	No rank and no gender conflicts. Usually a good relationship. Good understanding. Both are usually attentive and thoughtful with children. Father sets tone of relationship. Father is friendly and tolerant; mother is soft and submissive.
Youngest Brother of Sisters (YBS)	Oldest Sister of Brothers (OSB)	No rank and no gender conflicts. Ordinarily a good relationship. Great mutual understanding. Mother sets tone; father submits to her. Father likes mother's advice on professional matters, and seeks her encouragement. Whatever she does, he generally consents to or agrees.
Oldest Brother of Sisters (OBS)	Youngest Sister of Sisters (YSS)	Partial gender conflict. Relatively good relationship. Parents understand one another; but mother has difficulty adopting wifely role. She will oppose and compete with him sometimes; but this does not last long. He sets tone of family, but must do so inconspicuously, or she may become stubborn and insist she is right.
Youngest Brother of Sisters (YBS)	Oldest Sister of Sisters (OSS)	Partial gender conflict. Relatively good relationship. She is a bit tougher and more identified with authority than he likes; however, he does not contest her. She sets tone of family and does so much too seriously for him. Justice and order in family are important to her.
Oldest Brother of Brothers (OBB)	Youngest Sister of Brothers (YSB)	Partial gender conflict. Relatively favorable relationship. He may be tough and self-righteous in dealings with her, and may treat her as younger brother. She is used to this and can usually tone him down. Under her influence, he becomes more tolerant and open to her wishes and concerns.
Youngest Brother of Brothers (YBB)	Oldest Sister of Brothers (OSB)	Partial gender conflict. Relatively good relationship. He depends upon her leadership and guardianship. She retains motherly position toward him. He wants nothing more than to be understood. She treats him like one of her children. Since her nurturing is tolerant and friendly, instead of possessive, all goes well.
Oldest Brother of Sisters (OBS)	Oldest Sister of Brothers (OSB)	Rank or gender conflict. Relationship is only moderately favorable. Both tend to challenge the other's claim for leadership and responsibility. Each wants the other to give in; both find it difficult to do. Both learned to live with siblings of opposite gender in original families.
Youngest Brother of Sisters (YBS)	Youngest Sister of Brothers (YSB)	Rank or gender conflict. Relationship is only moderately good. Both expect their partner to provide leadership and responsibility. Yet neither is capable of it, since both were dependent on a person of the opposite gender in their original families. Each requires understanding, but feels he/she is insufficiently understood.
Oldest Brother of Brothers (OBB)	Youngest Sister of Sisters (YSS)	Rank or gender conflict. Relationship is only moderately favorable. Neither is accustomed to life with a peer of the opposite gender, since they had no such sibling in their original families. They agree on professional matters — male gives orders, and female acts impulsively. But, she accepts his directions; she needs his support. Their relationship remains tense for a long time.
Youngest Brother of Brothers (YBB)	Oldest Sister of Sisters (OSS)	Rank or gender conflict. Relationship is only moderately good. Neither has experienced opposite gender sibling in original family. According to age ranks among siblings, they should be compatible. She is the responsible leader; she advocates order and achievement. He submits to her command, which may be strict and brusque; but, he secretly opposes this. Their relationship is not relaxed or contented.
Oldest Brother of Sisters (OBS)	Oldest Sister of Sisters (OSS)	Rank and partial gender conflicts. Relationship is on unfavorable side. Both were oldest siblings in their original families; there may be a latent fight for dominance. Mother is not accustomed to peer of opposite gender. Father has had experience along this line and offers advice. But her pride and independence get in the way. She feels nobody can tell her anything, except her father. In family, male is more sympathetic and tolerant authority. Female is stricter and more rigid.
Youngest Brother of Sisters (YBS)	Youngest Sister of Sisters (YSS)	Rank and partial gender conflicts. Relationship is rather unfavorable. Only father has learned how to deal with peer of opposite gender. He expects leadership, nurturance, and care — not opposition. Mother is not sure whether to compete or submit. She notices he cannot provide leadership.

Table 2 (cont.). Sixteen parental couples classified by sibling position, gender and age rank conflicts, and degree of favorability of their association<sup>a</sup>

Father	Mother	Results
Oldest Brother of Brothers (OBB)	Oldest Sister of Brothers (OSB)	Rank and partial gender conflicts. Relationship is relatively unfavorable. Both parents are used to giving orders and bearing responsibility — the father in a more insistent fashion. Both find it difficult to admit that to their partner, and give in. Only wife is accustomed to peer of opposite gender. She offers advice; but husband resists. He requires achievement and obedience.
Youngest Brother of Brothers (YBB)	Youngest Sister of Brothers (YSB)	Rank and partial gender conflicts. Relationship is on unfavorable side. Only mother has had experience with peer of opposite gender. Both unconsciously search for someone who can offer them guidance and parental attention. Yet neither can give it to the other. He impresses her as erratic, competitive, and too dependent.
Oldest Brother of Brothers (OBB)	Oldest Sister of Sisters (OSS)	Rank and gender conflicts. Usually unfavorable relationship. Neither is prepared to deal with peer of opposite gender. Both have age rank conflict. Both claim leadership and expect partner to submit; neither can do this. They attribute what they dislike in partner to his/her gender.
Youngest Brother of Brothers (YBB)	Youngest Sister of Sisters (YSS)	Rank and gender conflicts. This is an unfavorable relationship. Neither has had experience with peer of opposite gender. Both are juniors, accustomed to being taken care of and guided by their families. They feel someone else is responsible for them. They are somewhat at a loss with each other. They cannot explain what is wrong with them.

Source: <sup>a</sup>Adapted from Toman (1976, pp. 198-228).

Table 3. Sixteen parental couples<sup>a,b</sup>

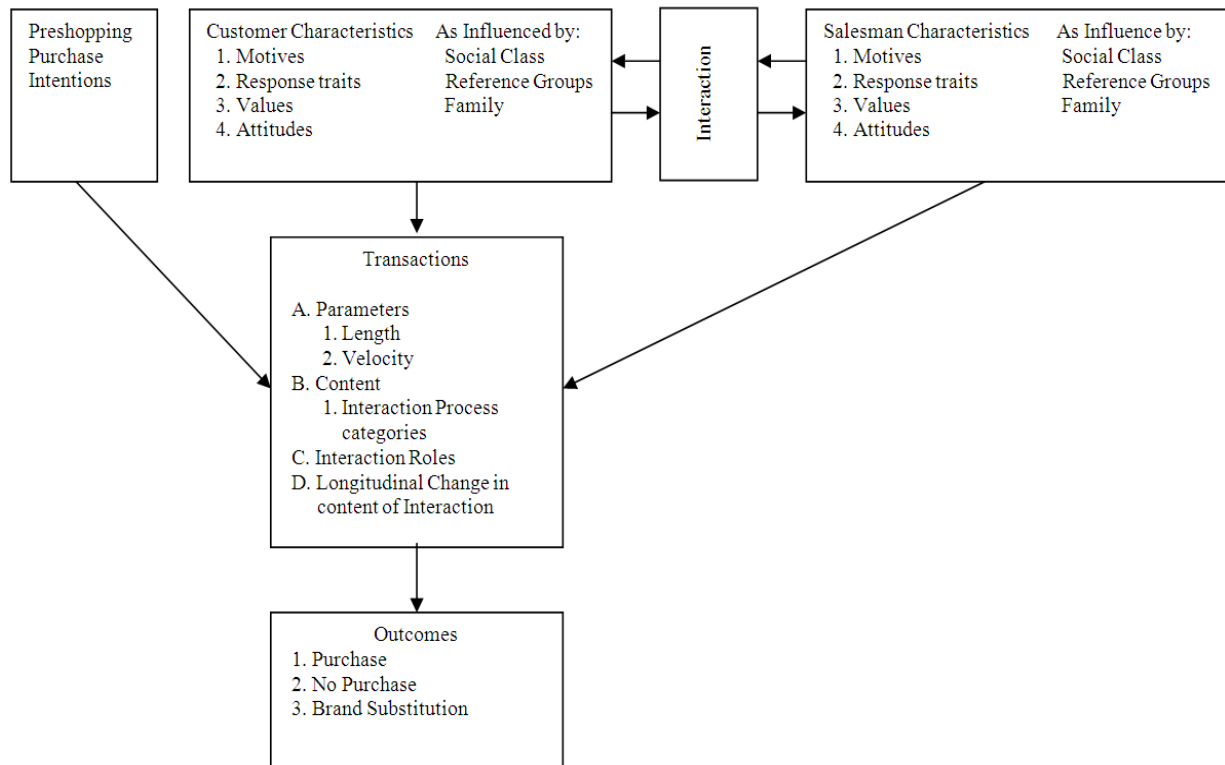
		Mother			
		OSB	OSS	YSB	YSS
Father	OBB	Rank and Partial Gender Conflicts Relatively Unfavorable Relationship	Rank and Gender Conflicts Unfavorable Relationship	Partial Gender Conflict Relatively Unfavorable Relationship	Rank or Gender Conflict Favorable Relationship
	OBS	Rank or Gender Conflict Favorable Relationship	Rank and Partial Gender Conflicts Unfavorable Relationship	No Rank and No Gender Conflicts Good Relationship	Partial Gender Conflict Relatively Good Relationship
	YBB	Partial Gender Conflict Relatively Good Relationship	Rank or Gender Conflict Moderately Good Relationship	Rank and Partial Gender Conflicts Unfavorable Relationship	Rank and Gender Conflicts Unfavorable Relationship
	YBS	No Rank and No Gender Conflicts Good Relationship	Partial Gender Conflict Relatively Good Relationship	Rank or Gender Conflict Moderately Good Relationship	Rank and Partial Gender Conflicts Unfavorable Relationship

Notes: <sup>a</sup>For more detailed discussion of these couples, refer to Table 2. <sup>b</sup>Adapted from Toman (1976, pp. 198-228).

Table 4. Salesperson-customer dyads categorized by sibling position and gender, similarity/dissimilarity of personality, and degree of favorability<sup>a</sup>

		Customer									
		OBB	OBS	YBB	YBS	OSB	OSS	YSB	YSS	OM	OF
Salesperson	OBB	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Mof	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Fav	Com Mof	Com Mof	Com Mof
	OBS	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Mof	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Fav	Com Fav	Com Mof	Com Mof
	YBB	Com Mof	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Fav	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf
	YBS	Com Mof	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Fav	Com Fav	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf
	OSB	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Fav	Com Fav	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Mof	Com Mof	Com Mof	Com Mof
	OSS	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Mof	Com Fav	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Mof	Com Mof	Com Mof	Com Mof
	YSB	Com Fav	Com Fav	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Mof	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf
	YSS	Com Mof	Com Fav	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Mof	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf
	OM	Com Mof	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Mof	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf
	OF	Com Mof	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Com Mof	Com Mof	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf	Sim Unf

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Every possible combination of salesperson and customer is coded relative to similarity or dissimilarity (complementarity) of personality characteristics and degree of favorability of the relationship. Specifically, in terms of personality attributes, Sim = similar and Com = complementary. Regarding degree of favorability, Unf = unfavorable, Fav = favorable, and Mof = moderately favorable.



Source: <sup>a</sup>Adapted from Willett and Pennington (1966).

**Fig. 1. A representative conceptualization of the salesperson-customer interaction<sup>a</sup>**