
Potential Effectiveness of Salesperson Mirroring and Empathy Training in Selling to Small Business: An Examination

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Abstract

The study reported here assessed the potential effectiveness of mirroring and empathy training for sales representatives who serve small business firms. The discussion provides a review of the relevant literature and a study, utilizing students as sales representatives, which was undertaken to assess the potential of training in empathy and mirroring. Generally, the research upholds the premise that these forms of training and instruction may be useful to sales managers and others who train salespersons.

Introduction

While marketing by small business has been extensively studied, marketing to small firms has essentially been neglected by academia (Ellegaard, 2006). This paper makes an attempt to help fill this void, by evaluating the usefulness of training in mirroring and empathy for sales representatives who serve small business clients

It is helpful to examine selling to small business because this segment represents an attractive target customer set for many firms, both large and small. Affluent economies, such as that in the United States, are highly dependent upon small business buyers for maintaining the flow of goods and services (Carree, Van Stel, Thurik, & Wennekers, 2007). Of course, some industries, such as tourism, are more dependent on small business clients than are others (Smith, 2006). Cotton & Cachon (2007) has produced evidence that small retailers can survive and grow even in the face of large mega-retailers such as Wal-Mart. Thus, these retailers represent a reliable long term target market. A U.S. Census Bureau study has found that businesses run by individuals and families and on the internet has spawned a rising trend in the numbers and

revenues of small businesses (Family, 2006). But turning these companies into customers often requires the development of trust and satisfaction and the provision of commitment and service quality, on the part of prospective vendor sales forces (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007).

In order to successfully penetrate the small business market, suppliers can benefit through means of enhancing the success of their personal selling programs. But there are many ways of doing this and what aspects of personal selling might be most helpful? This paper presents one approach—training in mirroring and empathy.

In the study described in this paper the selling performance of personal selling students who were the recipients of training in mirroring alone, empathy alone, and a combination of mirroring and empathy, as compared to the performance of those who were not so exposed, was evaluated. Should the accomplishments of the trained groups significantly exceed those of the untrained, support for the inclusion of mirroring and empathy in company sales training programs would be in evidence.

Literature Review

One means of successfully communicating with target customers is through nonverbal communication or “body language” (Mayer & Greenberg, 2006). Manning & Reece (1992) have depicted this as “messages without words” or “silent messages.” Mirroring is a type of body language. It consists of imitating the body language, speech patterns, and other behaviors of prospects. This form of communication makes up a set of skills which can be taught and learned (Schwebel & Schwebel, 2002) so its advantages can be attained by individuals who lack inherent natural ability.

Brownell (1999) has indicated that mirroring is conducting ourselves or behaving in a manner that offers a reflection back to the observer of themselves. It can include any or all of the following:

- Similar eye expression, e.g., eye contact, eye fixation, eye movement
- Similar energy, e.g., use of gestures, speed of motion or lack of motion
- Similar clothing, e.g., color, fashion, formal or informal
- Similar facial expressions, e.g., smiling, frowning, mouth relaxed
- Similar head position, e.g., erect, forward, backward, tilted
- Similar body position, e.g., relaxed, military
- Similar stance/posture, e.g., open, closed
- Similar voice expression, e.g., fast speech, slow speech, low tone, high tone
- Similar vocabulary, e.g., sophisticated, esoteric, familiar

Essentially, mirroring is grounded upon the fact that people tend to feel comfortable with those who communicate nonverbally the way they do (Weinberg & Toder, 2004). That is, they are drawn to people with whom their body language is like their own (Mowatt, 2006). However, some experts caution that there is a thin line between mirroring and mocking and A...if you go out and try blinking when they blink, nodding when they nod, and talking with their accent, people will think you =re making fun of them@ (Carter, 2001).

There are indications of mirroring applications to business activities other than sales. In this

regard, Gadberry proposes that financial analysts should clone the posture of the person being addressed when attempting to create a favorable impression in a business meeting or conversation (Gadberry, 1993). Another source suggests that human resource departments should encourage the use of mirroring by employees of the company, in order to reduce staff conflicts (Murphy, 1987). Yet another indicates that leaders should practice mirroring when interacting with subordinates, in order to engender motivation (de Vries & Kets, 1989).

In summary, various business related writings frequently mention the promise of mirroring. But, none of these evaluate the usefulness of this method in a sales context through an analytic and quantitative approach. By the objective of the present study.

This research examined the potential value of training salespersons in the practice of empathy. Empathy deals with emotions such as joy, pain, pride, guilt, love, beauty, sadness, and anxiety (Wong & Sohal, 2002). Essentially, empathy involves feeling the same emotion that is expressed by the prospect (Rand, 2006). Empathetic sales representatives can mentally place themselves in the other person's situation. They perceive this situation in the same manner as does the prospect (Martz, 2001).

Generally, empathy is a learned quality, although for some it may be an inherent trait (Bagozzi, 2006). Some sales representatives practice it without knowing it. But the real value found in empathy is to use it knowingly (Holm, 1997).

When employing empathy, the salesperson role plays the prospect, adapting to the perspective or attitude of the other (Angera & Long, 2005). He or she not only feels empathetic but also is able to project this quality in a way so that the prospect is aware that the sales representative understands the personal situation and problems that exist (Rasmusson, 2000).

Empathy is cited as incorporating four components (Hakansson & Montgomery, 2003):

1. The empathizer comprehends the target's emotions and situation.
2. The target feels one or more emotions.
3. The empathizer senses a similarity between what the target is feeling and something the empathizer has previously felt.
4. The empathizer cares about the well-being of the target.

Smith (2006) proposes that two types of empathy exist: cognitive (mental perspective taking) and emotional (vicarious sharing of emotion). The first, cognitive empathy, allows individuals to understand and predict the conduct of others in terms of attributed mental states. This can facilitate conversation and social expertise. Alternatively, emotional empathy moves individuals to act altruistically toward others. It promotes social bonding. In essence, true empathy integrates both the cognitive and emotional components (Kerem, Fishman, & Josselson, 2001). However, empathy should not be mistaken for sympathy. This is because the former involves both cognitive and affective responses, while the latter primarily entails affective responding (Martz, 2001).

Hypotheses

Some indicators suggest that mirroring could be a helpful contributor to productivity in the ranks of sales representatives. One inquiry has indicated that behavioral mirroring can affect the perceptions individuals hold regarding others' character and behavior (Manusov, 1993). A rationale for this is that cooperative thinking best occurs in the context of spatial relations, which

is characterized by an ability to opt for similarities (Barwick, 2004). Another study demonstrated that the perceived persuasiveness of an individual who employs mirroring in a group discussion is significantly greater than that of one who does not make use of this process (Van Swol, 2003).

Some references report on the effect of mirroring in particular applications and circumstances (Ingram, et. al., 1992). Those waiters who mirror the behavior of their customers have been able to obtain larger tips than those who do not and customers tend to voice greater satisfaction in conversing with waiters who mirror their non-verbal behavior (Diksterhurt, Smith, Van Buren, & Wigholes, 2005). In turn, married couples have been found to be collaborating indirectly as a symbolic resource in the construction of self identity by mirroring (Golen, 2002). A British brand design company (Williams Murray Hamm) discovered that they can best convince clients to use package designs created by the company by mirroring the behavior and ideas of the clients (Dowdy, 2006).

Both practical experience and research suggest that mirroring can be learned and taught. Organizations are alert for avenues that can add value to their training programs and one path for accomplishing this is to include topics that are especially relevant for the trainees (Dodgson, 2003). There is evidence that well-conceived training programs can successfully teach individuals to achieve proficiency in mirroring (Murphy, 1987). Schwebel & Schwebel (2002) make a blanket statement that mirroring incorporates a combination of skills that can be taught and learned. Social workers who have undergone focused in-classroom education in mirroring have produced more effective communications with their clients than have others who did not receive this training (Preston-Shoot, Taylor, & Lishman, 1999). Some parents who have received training in this area have shown progress in enhancing their ability to overcome problem behaviors in their

children (Van Zeiji, et. Al., 2006). One study indicates that therapists who obtain mirroring instruction tend to become more proficient in their work (Pisani, Colangeli, Giordani, & Popolla, 2006). Even actors who obtain this training have been found to improve their coherence with others with whom they interact (Dobel, Gumnior, Bolte, & Zwitterlood, 2007).

Of course, the discussion above does not suggest that mirroring training should replace traditional coverage, such as prospecting, querying, and listening. Rather, it appears that mirroring instruction may improve the achievement of the trainees, beyond that which they might accomplish by using only more conventional training coverage.

The literature review produces some support for the first hypothesis, which is:

1. H1: Sales representatives who are trained in mirroring will be more effective in producing intentions to purchase among small business target customers than will those who do not receive this training.

Various indications suggest that empathy is capable of contributing to personal selling productivity. Hence it may be a significant candidate for inclusion in training efforts. A recent review of the literature found that four positive emotions surfaced as necessary for high quality salesperson performance- attachment, customer relations Bpride, empathy, and emotional wisdom (Bagozzi, 2006). In addition, empathy has been identified as one of the characteristics of superior sales representatives (as gauged by customer satisfaction), along with assertiveness, ego strength, sense of urgency, ego drive, willingness to take risks, sociability, abstract reasoning, creativity, and skepticism (Rasmusson, 2000). At the retail stage, empathy has been proposed as the most crucial contributor to relationship quality at the company and employee levels (Wong & Sohal, 2002). Further, empathy seems to present a positive moderating effect between customer-oriented

attitude and customer-oriented behavior (Stock & Hoyer, 2005).

There is support for the position that empathy can be taught and that this training can improve productivity (Coulter & Coulter, 2003). It has been suggested that for professionals working with other people, a systematic training for the ability to show empathy should be a valuable and necessary part of their education (Holm, 1997). College students who have been trained in this area have been found to possess more empathy than those who are not and to advance their verbalization skills, understand situations more precisely, and to make more accurate insights on the thoughts of others, as a result (Brems, Fromme, & Johnson, 1992). Counselors with this training have been found to have advanced their listening abilities and counseling practices considerably (Nerdrum & Ronnestad, 2003). Psychotherapists have discovered that empathy training can improve their ability to communicate with their clients (Rand, 2006).

Empathy training has assisted normal children in their efforts to teach physical education to other children who have physical difficulties (Lockhart, French, & Gench, 1998). Couples in marriage and romantic relationships who have received empathy training have demonstrated advances in the quality of their relationships (Angera & Long, 2005).

The discussion above sets forth substantiation for the presumption of empathy training as an effective sales productivity enhancer. Accordingly, Hypothesis Two is:

2. H2: Sales representatives who are trained in empathy will be more effective in producing intentions to purchase among small business target customers than will those who do not receive this training.

Various indications suggest that, for sales representatives, a combination of mirroring practices and a mental state marked by empathy may be more productive than either of these

practices alone. That is, the two may be natural supplements that are able to bring about desirable synergistic outcomes. According to Batson, Lishner, Cook, & Sawyer (2005):

What accounts for variation in empathy? Currently, one of the most popular explanations among personality and social psychologists is perceived similarity. We feel sympathy and compassion for others to the degree that we perceive them to be like us.

Various other researchers have found possible indications of positive relationships between perceived similarity and empathy (Coulter & Coulter, 2003; Gill, Flaschner, & Scachar, 2006). The point is that when one engages in mirroring, he or she enters into a state of behavioral similarity. And, as similarity and empathy may be linked (Gill, Flaschner, & Shachar, 2006), there is a possible positive synergistic effect. As stated by Persson, Laaksolahti, & Lonnqvist (2001) "Expectations on visual appearance and behavior of others explains a great deal about empathy." When sales representatives are successful in mirroring, they may produce the impression on the part of the prospect that the two are both members of the same or similar groups, since their behavior is in concert. And empathy is a stronger predictor of communication effectiveness when the communicator and the recipient appear to be members of identical groups, thereby increasing the probability of attraction between the two parties (Sturmer, Snyder, & Omoto, 2005).

It appears that attachment style (the set of attitudes and perspectives which one holds when relating to others) may provide at least a partial explanation for a joint effect of mirroring and empathy. Research indicates the existence of three attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and ambivalent). The secure style is related to comfort with closeness to another person and a requirement for effective mirroring. In turn, a secure style is positively associated with empathic concern and ability to adopt the perspective of another (Joireman, Needham, & Cummings, 2002).

Both a secure attachment and empathy connote a willingness to approach others, and both act to facilitate functioning in interpersonal relationships. In turn, a secure attachment provides substantial support and comfort to relationship partners (Fraley & Shaver, 1998). Logically, mirroring can be contributive to the acceptance of a secure style.

Other signs of a connection between mirroring and empathy are attainable through a scrutiny of listening theory research (Batson, et. al., 05). From the customer=s perspective, listening may be the single most important skill that salespeople can hold (Moore, Eckrich & Carlson, 1986). In this regard, a study of sales representatives disclosed that one of the most significant reasons that salespeople are unsuccessful is failure to listen well (Ingram, Schwepker, & Hutson, 1992). In turn, Fracaro (2006) proposes that empathy may be of value in enhancing the probability of success achieved by sales representatives through active listening. Through listening, congruence can be attained among the thought processes of sales representatives and prospects, and research shows that congruence is closely associated with empathy (West, 2006). Further, agreeableness, another possible impact of listening, is significantly correlated with empathy (Lin, Chiu, & Hsieh, 2001).

When sales representatives mirror, they become attentive to verbal and non-verbal signals. In turn, the most effective listening combines empathy with specific techniques of active listening (Comer & Drollinger, 1999). While empathy and listening are two separate constructs, empathy is a salesperson characteristic which has the potential for raising listening skills (Aggarwal, Castleberry, Shepherd, & Ridnour, 2005). Sensing in listening includes non-verbal signals, such as body language, facial expressions and proxemics, and understanding refers to an individual =s capability of accurately ascribing meaning to incoming messages, both verbal and

non-verbal (Nicols & Stevens, 1957). Further, an element of listening consists of responding By transmitting messages back to speakers, showing that their messages have been correctly received. This process can ensure to the customer that accurate listening has occurred and encourage continued communication .

Comer & Drollinger (1999) refer to the process of combining empathy and listening, which they call Active-Empathetic Listening (AEL). This is defined as:

...a process whereby listeners receive verbal and non-verbal messages, process them cognitively, respond to them verbally and non-verbally, and attempt to assess their underlying meaning intuitively by putting themselves in the customers=place throughout. While active listening is desirable in the sales setting, it can appear to be contrived or empty. Active listeners try quite hard to appear attentive to verbal and non-verbal cues, but may seem to be listening mechanically and fail to project a genuine level of concern for what is actually being said. We contend that for communication to be effective, genuine concern is requisite.

The discussion above provides rationale for a third hypothesis. It is apparent that there may be rationale for a combination of mirroring and empathy training, serving as a supplement to traditional training. The hypothesis follows:

3. H3: Sales representatives who are trained in both mirroring and empathy will be more effective in producing intentions to purchase among small business target customers than will those who do not receive this training or who are trained in empathy but not mirroring or mirroring but not empathy.

Research Methodology

Controlled experimentation was the method utilized to assess the hypotheses. This method

permits testing the impact of one or more variables (such as training) on other variables (such as sales performance), in order to arrive at conclusions (Peterson, 1995). The productivity of students who were trained in mirroring and empathy was compared to the productivity of those who did not receive such training. In turn, statistical analyses of the results revealed whether the hypotheses stated earlier should be supported or rejected.

The study involved students who were enrolled in the authors' personal selling classes over two academic years and two summer sessions. Each of twelve separate classes was broken down into four groups. In turn every one of the groups was assigned to one of four research groups (three of which were treatment and one was a control group). All four research groups consisted of the same number of students (120) selected randomly from the class rolls, for a total sample size of 480.

The members of each research group were exposed to specific training or lack of training experiences, in addition to conventional lecture and discussion, case analysis, role play, and textbook reading assignments. These specific experiences took place two weeks before final examination week. This timing was in effect in order that the training of the students and the field experiments would have sufficient time for completion but would not interfere with final examination week. Their treatments were as follows: Group One members obtained training in mirroring. Those in Group Two received empathy training. The students in Group Three secured training in both mirroring and empathy. Finally, Group Four (control group) participants were not exposed to training in either mirroring or empathy.

In this study, the sampling plan was structured so that the students in each class were

randomly assigned to the groups by the instructor. As a means of mitigating contamination of the results, those portions of the required textbook which covered mirroring or empathy were not assigned to the class and the instructor did not touch upon these topics in the regular classroom lectures.

The individuals in Research Group One attended two sessions (made up of fifty minutes each) of training in mirroring. In turn, research suggests that training periods of this length can be effective in conveying insights and perspectives on nonverbal communication (Schwebel & Schwebel, 2002). Allied training insights are available in (Boardman, 1995 and Mowatt, 2006).

During the first training session in mirroring, the students received a set of instructions on how to mirror and were requested to study it briefly. Next, the instructor lectured for twenty-five minutes, going over each of the sections in the instructions. After this, a student (not a participant in the study) who had been briefed by the instructor posed as a prospect in a role playing situation where the instructor explained each item in the instructions. In this case, the role playing process was of twenty minutes duration. In a follow-up training session the instructor and the role playing student demonstrated each of the items in the document, over a twenty-five minutes time span. For the next twenty minutes, the students practiced each of the suggestions, using another student as a prospect. This second training experience closed with a five minute review of the previously-covered material. The Group Two members attended two sessions (made up of fifty minutes each) of empathy training. Related training insights are available in (Edwards, 2006 & Smith 2006).

During the first empathy training session, the students received a set of instructions on how to use empathy and were asked to study it briefly. Next the instructor lectured for twenty-five

minutes, going over each of the items listed in the instructions. After this, a student (not a participant in the study) who had been briefed by the instructor acted in a role play exercise, where the instructor demonstrated each item in the document. This role playing procedure consumed twenty minutes.

In a follow-up empathy training session, the students received a second set of instructions on how to use empathy. These instructions explained exercises to be performed in the classroom. The exercises were devised to assist students in developing self awareness and in becoming aware of cognitive and affective variations among individuals. In turn, these two qualities are normally embodied in programs formulated to train personnel for counseling roles (Smith, 2006) and have been used successfully by the authors in empathy training programs for professional sales representatives and personal selling students. Each of the exercises was performed by the students in a ten minute time span. Finally, the training session concluded with a ten-minute review of the material previously included in the two Empathy training sessions.

The students in Group Three were subjected to both the mirroring and the empathy training experiences, as described above. The goal was to discover the joint outcome of the two training themes. Finally, those who were assigned to Group Four made up the control group. These individuals were not required to participate in either mirroring or empathy training.

An attempt was made to standardize the nature of the training which each of the groups experienced. That is, insofar as was possible, each group obtained training that was delivered in the same manner and with the same degree of positive support on the part of the instructor. In short, an attempt was made to eliminate or at least moderate bias brought about by the predispositions of the trainer.

During the second to the last week of the semester (after the students had undertaken the training involved in the study) each student made a sales call on an assigned small business that was not assigned to another student (to avoid research contamination that might result from sales calls from two students). The subjects were selected randomly from the yellow pages of the local and two sister cities =telephone books and assigned to groups in a random fashionBa systematic sample. The authors contacted each business on the list and requested that the manager serve as a prospect for a student sales presentation. The goal of each student was to make a person-to-person sales call with the purpose of convincing the manager to attend a free Aeffective selling techniques @seminar conducted by one of the author/professors on campus. The students were instructed to employ the materials that they had learned in regularly-scheduled classes, in the training sessions prescribed by the research, and in the textbook in their persuasion efforts. Further, they were required to avoid collaborating with each other prior to the sales call, as a means of evading contamination of the study results from this source.

The composition of the sample was 209 small retailers, 172 small service firms, 63 small manufacturers, 31 small wholesalers, and 5 Aother@small firms. The members of each of the four research groups contacted an equal proportion of the five industry groups, in order to mitigate contamination arising from the mix of industries.

The goal of the research was to collate the effectiveness of the four groups in generating sought-after results. Three dependent variables were used to measure this goal. One was the number of successful sales (verbal intentions to attend the seminar as expressed by the retailers). An alternative dependent variable Bactual attendance at the retailer seminarBcould have been

used. However, the researchers bypassed this option, as factors other than the persuasiveness of the student (such as the managers' personal time schedules, time conflicts, contingencies emerging in their business operations, unexpected travel, and prior obligations) could affect their attendance at the seminar. The level of student training was deemed sufficient by the researcher to result in strong application of mirroring and empathy efforts in only one presentation. Other researchers have used only one sales call to measure empathy and related skills (Comer & Drollinger, 1999). A second dependent variable was a set of self reports prepared by the students, as regards the perceived effectiveness of the education/training they received throughout the semester (this includes mirroring, empathy, and regularly-scheduled instruction). The third dependent variable was self-reporting by the students on the value of the mirroring and empathy training they received.

Analysis of Results

Table One sets forth data on the number of small firms specifying an intention to attend the seminar. Following each sales presentation the student/sales representative asked the manager/prospect to respond to a one question questionnaire while the student was absent from the room. The questionnaire read: "Please indicate on this form with an X, your intentions to attend the seminar." In turn, the alternative responses were: "Definitely will attend," "Probably will attend," "Don't know," "Probably will not attend," and "Definitely will not attend." A *Chi Square* test of the frequencies indicates significant differences between the group frequencies at a .05 level. The calculated value of *Chi Square* was 26.297, exceeding the critical value (21.026) with twelve degrees of freedom.

TABLE ONE
SMALL BUSINESS INTENTIONS TO ATTEND THE SEMINAR

Group	Expressed Intention											
	Probably will attend		Don't will attend		Probably will know		Probably will not attend		Definitely will not attend		Totals	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
One	23	19.2 [^]	23	19.2	29	24.2* [^]	24	20.0	21	17.4	120	100.0
Two	28	23.3* [^]	30	25.0* [^]	19	15.8 [^]	23	19.2	20	16.7	120	100.0
Three	34	28.3* [^]	35	29.2* [^]	12	10.0	20	16.7	19	15.8	120	100.0
Four	17	14.2	10	8.3	21	17.5	38	31.7* [^]	34	28.3* [^]	120	100.0
Totals	102	21.2	98	20.4	81	16.9	105	21.9	94	19.6	480	100.0

*Identifies a percent which is significantly greater than the percent of the remaining groups in the column, according to a *t* test at the .05 level.

[^]Identifies a percent which is significantly greater than the percent of the next largest percent in the column, according to a *Tukey k* test at the .05 level.

Those groups with statistically significant percentages, according to *t* tests at the .05 level, are identified in the table. There is support for the Hypothesis One (Representatives with training in mirroring will be more effective than those who are not trained). In this case, Group One (mirroring only) produced a larger percentage than the control group for ADefinitely will attend@ and for AProbably will attend@ and smaller percentages for AProbably will not attend@ and ADefinitely will not attend.@ These results suggest that training in mirroring may have some merit in furthering sales representative productivity with small business-to-business prospects..

Further, there is support for Hypothesis Two (Representatives who are trained in empathy will be more effective than those who are not trained). This is because Group Two acquired larger proportions than the control group for ADefinitely will attend@ and AProbably will attend.@ The

‘Probably will not attend’ and ‘Definitely will not attend’ values were substantially lower than that of the control group. There is support, then, for the proposition that training in empathy has some merit for sales representatives.

In addition, there is support for Hypothesis Three (Representatives who are trained in both mirroring and empathy will be more effective than those who are not trained, trained only in empathy or only in mirroring). Group Three has statistically significant percentages for ‘Definitely will attend’ and ‘Probably will attend’ and its percentages for ‘Probably will not attend’ and ‘Definitely will not attend’ are low, compared to the other groups. It appears that training in both mirroring and empathy may produce desirable synergistic effects for sales representatives.

The analysis reported above was reinforced through an analysis of variance. Each of the frequencies presented in Table One were considered as an element in this assessment. Table Two sets forth the results of the analysis. It is apparent that the differences between the groups are significant.

TABLE TWO
ANOVA SUMMARY RESULTS

<u>Level</u>	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Mean Square</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Critical F Value</u>
Between Groups	32.26	3	10.75	3.79*	3.24
Within Groups	45.50	16	2.84		

*Denotes statistical significance at the .05 level, according to a table of F

In order to determine which groups generated results that differed from others, *Tukey k* tests were performed for each column in Table One. In turn, the test involves assessing the differences between the scores for each group. The *Tukey k* tests produced the same significant differences for the data in each column of the table as did the *t* tests discussed earlier. This supports all three of the hypotheses.

The subjects self reported on what they perceived to be the value of the learning experience which they underwent in taking the class during the semester. A straightforward metric was used to attain this end. Expressly the students were informed AWe want to measure the extent to which you feel that the training which you received in class this semester prepared you for conducting your selling task. On a scale of one to seven, where one signifies APrepared me very well@and seven signifies A@Did not prepare me very well,@how would you rate the training which you received in class? @Table Three sets forth the mean scores for the various groups..

TABLE THREE
PERCEIVED TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

<u>Group</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>
One	5.5*
Two	5.8*
Three	6.3*
Four	<u>5.0</u>
Total	5.6

*Signifies a mean score that is significantly greater than the next highest mean score, according to a *Tukey K* test at the .05 level.

For the perceived effectiveness measure described above, a *Tukey K* test indicates that the Group One mean value is significantly larger than that of Group Four, providing support for the first hypothesis (Representatives trained in mirroring will be more effective than those who did not receive this training). In addition, the Group Two mean value is significantly larger than that of Group Four, lending support for the second hypothesis (Representatives who are trained in empathy will be more effective than those who did not receive this training). Finally, the Group Three mean is significantly greater than those for all of the other groups, and this finding is in conformity with Hypothesis Three (Representatives who are trained in both mirroring and empathy will be more effective than those with no training, training only in empathy, or training only in mirroring).

The three experimental group subjects were requested to assess the value of the training (outside of the regularly scheduled instruction) to which they were exposed. This appraisal occurred after they had already carried out their sales presentations. They were given a short

questionnaire which instructed them to rate this training in terms of: (1) How much did I learn from this training? (2) What is the practical value of this training to me for my future job success? and (3) What was the value of this training in motivating me to achieve in selling? Previous studies have used these specific dimensions to evaluate the usefulness of alternative pedagogies (Peterson, 1995). The three constructs was assessed on a seven-point scale ranging from AVery little @to AVery much@. Table Four sets forth the results. The data indicate that Group Three generated the largest mean score. In turn, this score is significantly larger than the values for Groups One and Two, producing support for Hypothesis Three (Representatives trained in both mirroring and empathy will be more effective than those with no training, training only in mirroring or training only in empathy. It is apparent that the mean scores of Groups One and Two were not statistically different from one another.

TABLE FOUR
PERCEIVED TRAINING VALUE

<u>Group</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>
One	5.6
Two	5.8
Three	<u>6.4*</u>
Total	5.9

*Signifies a mean score that is significantly greater than the next highest mean score, according to a *Tukey K* test at the .05 level.

Discussion

Both academic research and practice in the arena of personal selling is in a stage of continual change and reveals new concepts, strategies, tactics, and relationships on an ongoing basis. Conversely, some of the more traditional techniques and methods tend to be abandoned or overlooked by researchers and sales representatives. Two such techniques are training in mirroring and empathy.

This manuscript has focused on possible positive effects of training in mirroring and empathy and their joint contribution to prowess in selling to small business. The study which has been described suggested that both mirroring and empathy training have potential usefulness, especially when they are employed in tandem. In turn, the high consistency between the results of the three measures of student performance suggests that the research approach taken possesses

an acceptable degree reliability and validity for the research approach.

The outcome of the study suggests that mirroring and empathy instruction should be considered as a component in the educational and training programs undertaken by sales managers. It is not presumed that these two subjects should replace or lead to the de-emphasis of more traditional and more widely-used topics and focal points, but that they can perform a useful supportive and reinforcing function.

As was demonstrated in previous sections of this paper, mirroring may be most useful when it is employed as an enhancement and in accord with empathy. This being the case, training in the two processes can be undertaken through a synthesis, approach, where the two can operate in sync and reinforce one another. The assumption that one can operate as a substitute for the other may be erroneous.

This study had several limitations. Students enrolled in personal selling classes in one university setting, rather than professional salespersons, carried out the presentations. Further, they promoted a service which did not have a monetary price (The only expenses for the small business prospects were the time and effort which they would spend in attending the seminar). Thus, the setting was somewhat remote from Areal world@situations and cannot be generalized to all sales-to-small-business applications without reservation. In addition, the dependent variables were subjective, to some degree, and cannot be construed as completely exact and inclusive gauges of selling achievement.

A latent limitation of the inquiry is that the composition of the experimental and control groups could have differed in to the extent that personal characteristics confounded the outcomes. The chosen course of action to prevent this development was to assign students to the groups in a

random manner, in an effort to moderate conceivable confounding from various points of origin

It is recommended that further inquiries be undertaken in settings which more exactly resemble actual selling situations, using dependent variables which are likely to more exactly assess effectiveness in selling and which control for possible extraneous factors. Additional research could focus on the most productive pedagogy for training in mirroring and empathy. For example, comparisons could be made, on the relative effectiveness of lecture, role playing, demonstrations, coaching, on-line programs, and other avenues for instruction.

The measures on intentions to attend the seminar and those which required self-reporting on the part of the student/sales representatives furnished evaluation of the short-run effect of mirroring and empathy on sales performance and the value of the educational experience. Sales managers, especially those who desire extensive relationship building with customers, might desire measures of more enduring effects through the analysis of variables such as perceptions, attitude change, and relationship quality. Further, academic instructors of sales and sales management courses might desire the evaluation of more enduring variables. Future research might address these.

The material covered in this paper can be relevant to a number of managers who are involved in selling to small business. Some guidelines and precautions apply to the subject matter, however. These follow:

One set of suggestions applies directly to empathy training. Learning the practice of empathy can be particularly challenging, since this is more a philosophy, state of mind, and set of attitudes than it is a set of specific techniques which can be employed in a mechanistic fashion (Stock & Hoyer, 2005). Lectures and readings can be useful in the initial stages, but in order to

fully master the practice, trainees must be highly involved and undergo training sessions where they are participative, rather than passive recipients of descriptive materials. Techniques which may be useful are group discussion, role playing script analysis, and case analysis. Often a combination of two or more of these may be advantageous for sales managers who want to stress the mastery of using empathy.

Other suggestions relate to training in both mirroring and empathy. Individual firms and companies within particular industries of course, may vary in the extent to which mirroring and empathy are included as components of their training programs. Sales managers with very restricted budgets may decide to focus primarily upon more traditional conveyance modes and restrict instruction in these two fields. It is recommended, however, that an attempt be made to furnish at least some cursory treatment of the two in their programs.

The research described in this paper has suggested that training in mirroring and empathy need not be unduly time consuming, in order to produce positive results. Thus, even moderate focus on these topics may be worthwhile. The subjects in the study received only one hundred minutes of training (in both mirroring and empathy). Yet there is substantial evidence that this training had a favorable effect on their measured performance. This is not to say that extensive and continuing training is never needed, of course, but only to suggest that limited training efforts may be sufficient when time and/or funding resources are not in abundance. The research indicated that the experimental groups who were trained in either mirroring or empathy generated more favorable results than did the control group. In instances where training time and effort is very constrained and it is not possible to cover both topics, it may be desirable to include only one.

Even very small firms who lack specialized training staff and budgets can effectively utilize

mirroring and empathy schooling, for all practical purposes. These organizations may be in a position to employ role playing and on-the-job programs to furnish sufficient insights on these topics. Expensive trainers, consultants, and software are not necessarily required in order to implement the two subjects and may, in some instances, be replaced by more concrete and practical approaches.

Sales managers who are actively engaged in recruiting new members of their sales forces may discover that the results of the study suggest means of achieving results that are in concert with their objectives. In this regard, recruits who have training and experience in mirroring and empathy, in academic or industry settings may have capabilities that set them apart from others who are not so endowed. Further, knowledgeable recruits may require only moderate or even no further training in these fields (L'Herisson, 1981). Of course, training in these techniques is only a part of the desired background for new employees, but may be of significance in acquiring desirable candidates and furthering their performance in the field.

It is possible that marketing executives who are not sales managers can discover that some of their subordinates could improve their performance as a result of mirroring and/or empathy instruction. Generalization of the results of the study to other functions may be possible, in some instances, although this extension is beyond the scope of the research set forth in this paper. Numerous marketing personnel, including those in advertising, product management, and customer service are responsible for convincing other individuals, both within and outside the company, to accept, reject, or modify their views, attitudes, and behavior. Brand managers, for instance, often possess very limited authority over those outside of their departments and in the ranks of important constituencies and must depend heavily upon their persuasive abilities to

accomplish their major objectives. Merchandising managers or other executives who supervise the work of brand managers and assistant brand managers may find that such training is constructive. Virtually all marketing executives need persuasion in order to justify their organization budgets to top management. In fact, few marketing positions are not, at least to some degree, in need of persuasive activity in dealing with subordinates, peers, and superiors. Thus, the training may be merited and well-worth the resources that are devoted to this activity.

The recruiting, selection, and education of trainers are important functions. In turn, the trainers should be committed to the processes of mirroring and empathy and ideally have schooling or practical experience in these areas. Some professionals have only limited insights that bear upon these two functions and may require further instruction, if they are to have credibility and make useful contributions. For many firms, this is not an insurmountable barrier, as most sales managers probably realize that their trainers require additional upgrading with the passage of time.

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