Satisfaction in Buyer-seller Relationships – Influence of Cultural Differences

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Do cultural differences between buyers and sellers influence their satisfaction – and thus the functioning of the cross-national relationships involved? Do buyers and sellers representing culturally distinct countries emphasize the same antecedents for achieving satisfaction?

Relationships between buyer and seller are important in cross-national business. Since establishing new relationships is both time-consuming and costly, maintaining existing relationships is often more beneficial. In order to maintain relationships, mutual satisfaction between the partners is a prerequisite. However, only a limited number of studies have addressed satisfaction in cross-national business relationships in which the exchange partners represent different cultures. Cultural background influences thinking and behavior and might therefore influence antecedents of satisfaction.

In our research, we studied the differences between fish buyers from Russia and sellers from Norway – two culturally distinct countries. The “ blat” culture, forcing people to use personal relationships and informal networks in order to get things done in the Russian system, is still prevalent in Russia today. This is evident for all the antecedents included in this research. Russian buyers emphasize the importance of developing personal relationships in order to develop trust. Also, Russians show reluctance to give away company information. Thus, before being able to receive any information from the Russian partner it is crucial to have built close relationships. Norwegians, on the other hand, emphasize company trust and show more willingness to share information.

The Russian buyers have a power advantage because of an import ban imposed on Norwegian red fish as of 1 January 2006. A handful of Russian importers were authorized to choose which Norwegian companies should be given import approval or not, making close relationships with the right Russian partner extremely important. In regards to commitment, Norwegian sellers prefer to have formal, written contracts to secure future volumes and prices. On the other hand, due to uncertainty avoidance and the country’s history of sudden, dramatic changes, the Russian buyers were more reluctant to committing to future obligations. The Russians, however, commit to their partners by spending a lot of time and effort to build close, personal relationships.

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