

# Analysis of the Phenomenon of Therapeutic Alliance between Practitioner and Client as a Key Factor of Retention and Emotional Attachment in the Personal Services Sector

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**Abstract:** *The intensification of competitive rivalry in the personal services sector makes long-term consumer retention a key condition for ensuring business sustainability and profitability. In this context, the study aims to transfer the concept of therapeutic alliance from psychotherapeutic practice to nonclinical formats (beauty services, coaching, consulting) in order to determine its influence on the formation of client loyalty and emotional attachment. The purpose of the work is a systematic examination of the structural components of the alliance, their adaptation to the specifics of the personal services industry, and an assessment of their predictive value for consumer behavior. The methodological basis includes theoretical synthesis and content analysis of relevant publications on relationship quality and loyalty, as well as the construction of conceptual models based on generalized empirical data. It was revealed that the classical three-component model of the alliance (goals, tasks, bond) is adequately transferred to the services sphere, but with a noticeable redistribution of the significance of its elements: it is the emotional bond that acts as the dominant factor ensuring long-term client commitment, nullifying the influence of purely utilitarian aspects. The scientific novelty lies in the development of an adapted theoretical model of the therapeutic alliance for the personal services industry. The practical significance of the results is manifested in their applicability by relationship marketing specialists and managers to optimize client retention strategies.*

**Keywords:** therapeutic alliance, client retention, emotional attachment, personal services sector, working alliance, client loyalty, relationship quality, relationship marketing, consumer behavior, psychology of services.

## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary service sector, a gradual transition is observed from a utilitarian-transactional approach toward a relational paradigm in which the primary significance is attributed not to a single sale but to the sequential establishment of mutually beneficial and trust-based interaction with the client. Especially pronounced is this tendency in the segment of personal services where each client engagement is suffused with a deeply personal context. The global beauty and personal care services market, the volume of which by 2025 is projected to exceed 670 billion USD [1], becomes a prototype of a fiercely competitive arena in which differentiation by price or product quality gradually loses its effectiveness.

At the same time empirical data consistently confirm that retaining an existing client costs companies approximately 5–7 times less than attracting a new one which predestines loyalty not simply as a desirable but as an economically necessary resource for sustainable business development [2]. In this situation there arises a need for scientific analysis of those internal mechanisms that ensure the formation and consolidation of client attachment.

Despite the extensive international practice of studying consumer satisfaction and loyalty, the psychological aspects of the supplier – client dyadic interaction remain poorly researched to date. Marketing concepts typically emphasize utilitarian benefits and rational motives, relegating interpersonal processes to the background. Meanwhile, psychology and psychotherapy have accumulated theoretical and empirical experience in the analysis of helping

relationships, in which the primary role is played by the so-called therapeutic alliance – the conscious collaboration between therapist and client, first described within the psychoanalytic school [3]. Edward Bordin's pan-theoretical model, which identifies three universal components of alliance- agreement on goal setting, consensus on the selection of tasks to achieve these goals, and the strength of the affective bond- represents an especially promising basis for transferring this approach to a non-clinical context [4].

**The aim** of the study is to analyze the phenomenon of the therapeutic alliance as a determinant of client retention and emotional attachment in the personal services sector.

**The scientific novelty** of the work lies in the operationalization and conceptual adaptation of the psychotherapeutic alliance model to the realities of commercial personal services, which enables the establishment of a new theoretical platform for the analysis and management of client loyalty.

The proposed **hypothesis** assumes that the robustness of the therapeutic alliance, based on mutual understanding of goals, agreement on working methods, and a developed emotional bond, acts as the primary predictor of long-term client loyalty and surpasses traditional factors such as pricing policy and technical quality of services in predictive power.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Analysis of the therapeutic alliance phenomenon between practitioner and client in the field of personal services reveals several intersecting but methodologically heterogeneous

research strands. First, studies originating in the psychotherapeutic discourse form the theoretical core of the alliance concept as a combination of working cooperation, emotional connectedness, and relational authenticity. Thus, a meta-analysis of the sibling constructs of working alliance and real relationship shows a statistically significant but heterogeneous association of these constructs with counseling outcomes, underscoring the need to operationalize the components of reality and contract in specialist–client relations (Vaz A. M. et al. [4]). Within the general common-factors paradigm of therapy, Fife S. T. et al. [5] refine the metatheory of common factors, identifying, in addition to alliance, elements of motivational congruence and relational context, which allows these categories to be extrapolated to non-psychotherapeutic services provided their descriptive languages are adapted. The issue of ruptures and their repair within Acceptance and Commitment Therapy highlights the dynamic nature of the alliance, its susceptibility to crises, and the necessity of managed interventions to restore trust (Walser R. D., O'Connell M. [11]). The transition to hybrid and online interaction formats illuminates the question of whether the alliance can be mediated by digital technologies: quantitative comparison shows that alliance quality online is comparable to face-to-face formats but has different predictors (for example, technological simplicity of the interface and asynchronous communications) (Eichenberg C. et al. [6]). In a broader ontogenetic key, emotional education is discussed as a condition for personal growth and the capacity for empathic interaction (Oron J. V., Navarro-Rubio S., Luis E. O. [3]).

Second, the line of marketing and service studies examines categories close in meaning, such as mechanisms of loyalty formation and retention. Empirical data on relationships in online environments demonstrate that storytelling functions as a symbolic glue strengthening the firm–client bond, especially when physical contact is scarce (Kemp E. et al. [7]). Smith K. K. [8] emphasizes the role of rapport and relational investments in client satisfaction and commitment, showing that the emotional labor of frontline staff is an investment convertible into commitment. Pamacheche R., Duh H. I. [9] transfer the concept of commercial friendship to the context of hairdressing services, demonstrating that personal loyalty and perceived price benefits act as a dual outcome of prolonged emotional exchange between stylist and client. At the industry level, Choi K. [2] shows that service quality and perceived consumer value in nail salons mediate satisfaction with problematic services, thereby indirectly confirming that the alliance is not only an emotional but also an instrumental–value resource.

The third group of sources sets the macro-framework and trend shifts: global reports record growth and fragmentation of the beauty & personal care market, the strengthening of personalization and technologization of services, which increases the importance of retaining clients through emotionally rich relationships under conditions of high competition [1, 12]. Gartner expert forecasts highlight three trends in the future of customer service—proactive support, hyper-personalization, and AI integration— which raises the

question of how algorithms will co-construct or replace elements of the alliance [13].

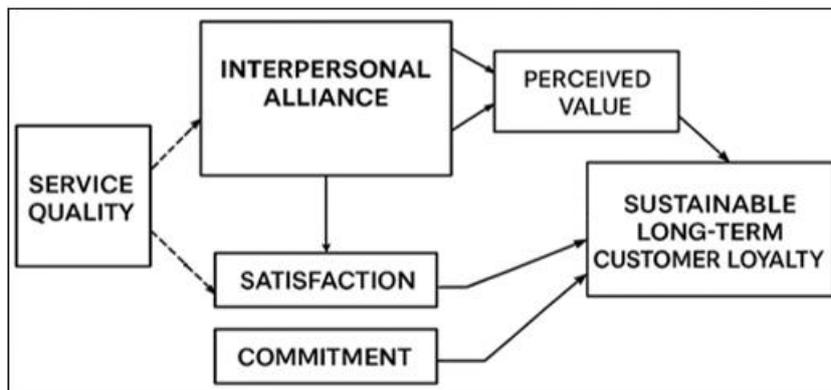
Finally, individual studies from related fields demonstrate the importance of the alliance as a predictor of adherence to therapeutic protocols: a multivariate model for forecasting adherence to exercise in COPD shows that personalized communication and trust in the specialist increase compliance with recommendations, which can be interpreted as a functional equivalent of client retention in the service sector [10]. Thus, in related disciplines, the alliance appears as a statistically measurable factor of behavior rather than merely a rhetorical construct.

Methodologically, the body of work is distributed among meta-analytic syntheses [4], deductive qualitative analysis [5], quantitative cohort and regression models [2, 10], experimental–survey designs in marketing [7, 8, 9] and sectoral big-data analytics [1, 12, 13]. This diversity of approaches reflects the poly-disciplinary nature of the object but complicates synthesis due to heterogeneous operationalizations.

In summary, several contradictions should be noted. First, in the psychotherapeutic literature the alliance is interpreted as a relationship with equal activity of the parties, whereas in marketing studies an instrumental approach to emotional connection as a means of commercializing trust dominates; this generates an ethical–practical tension between authenticity and strategicity of relations [4, 8]. Second, data on online alliances [6] are still weakly integrated with trend forecasts of service digitalization [13], leaving open the question of the boundaries of digital empathy and algorithmic support of rapport. Third, cross-industry extrapolations (for example, from medicine to the beauty industry) are rarely accompanied by validation of metrics and theoretical models for the specifics of personal services [2, 10]. Poorly covered are: mechanisms of alliance resilience under high staff turnover in the beauty industry; the role of cultural and gender factors in constructing commercial friendship; the dynamics of micro-ruptures and repairs of the alliance under conditions of short but repeated contacts (manicure, haircut); the influence of AI tools on the subjective feeling of being heard by the client; econometric modeling of the alliance's contribution to client LTV while simultaneously accounting for price sensitivity. These issues form a promising agenda for further research on the therapeutic alliance phenomenon in personal services.

### 3. Results and Discussion

As a result of a comprehensive theoretical synthesis, an adapted conceptual model was created that systematizes the relationships between the elements of the alliance and key business metrics in the field of personal services (Figure 1). It is based on the assumption that sustainable long-term customer loyalty is ensured not by the direct effect of service quality, but by the outcome of building a robust interpersonal alliance.



**Figure 1:** Adapted model of therapeutic alliance in the field of personal services (compiled by the author based on [4, 5, 12]).

The proposed model is based on three key elements developed by Vaz A. M. et al. [4] and adapted to the needs of commercial practice:

- 1) **Unity of Goals (Goals):** reflects the degree of congruence between the practitioner’s and the client’s views of the intended outcome. If in psychotherapy goals are often formulated abstractly (self-actualization), here they are clearly specified (rejuvenation at the level of skin cells, reduction of waist circumference by 10 cm). The main task of the specialist at this stage is to adjust the client’s expectations so that they correspond to the real possibilities of the procedure and disappointment does not arise later.
- 2) **Agreement on Measures (Tasks):** means the client’s acceptance of those methods and techniques that the practitioner proposes to achieve the agreed goals. This may be a detailed training plan, a regulation of a cosmetic intervention, or a system for exam preparation. In this case, trust in the practitioner’s expertise plays a decisive role: the client must be confident in the appropriateness and effectiveness of each measure proposed by them.

- 3) **Emotional Bond (Bond):** the most multilayered and delicate component, including empathy, mutual respect, trust, and a sense of psychological comfort. It is precisely this element that takes the interaction beyond a purely commercial exchange and creates in the client a sense of the unique value of the service, which is difficult for competitors to reproduce. According to research, clients are often willing to pay a higher price and overcome significant distances for a practitioner with whom such a bond has been formed [9, 13].

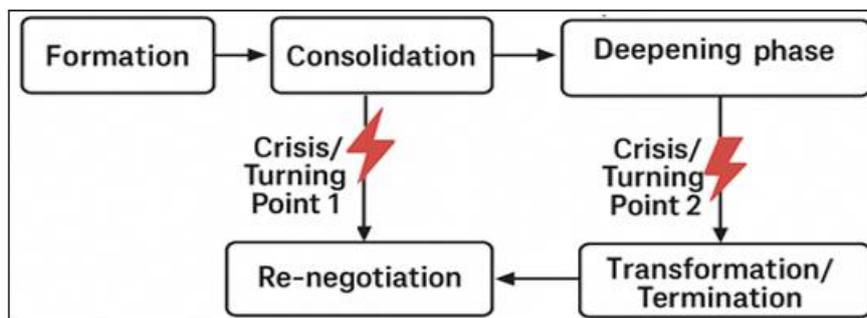
The combined influence of these three elements determines key business effects: repeat visits (retention), stable emotional attachment (immunity to competitors’ offers), and active dissemination of positive reviews in the social environment. To determine the relative significance of each component in the context of long-term retention, a synthesis of generalized data from relevant studies was performed [7, 8, 10].

The unique features of the alliance in the service sector become especially evident in a comparative analysis with the classical psychotherapeutic model (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Comparative analysis of therapeutic alliance components in psychotherapy and personal services (compiled by the author based on [6, 7, 8, 10]).

Component	Manifestation in psychotherapy	Manifestation in the field of personal services	Expected significance
Goals	Often abstract, aimed at internal change (reducing anxiety, self-knowledge).	Predominantly specific, measurable, aimed at an external result (a new haircut, physical shape).	High
Tasks	Joint exploration, insights, completion of homework assignments. The roles of therapist and client are clearly defined.	Concrete actions and procedures (workouts, treatments, consultations). The practitioner’s role is more directive.	Medium
Bond	Foundation of therapy. Trust, acceptance, empathy as a therapeutic tool.	Foundation of loyalty. Trust, liking, comfort, commercial friendship.	Very high

A partnership alliance functions as an evolving system, passing through temporal stages and undergoing crisis-driven turning points. The dynamic model presented in Figure 2 clearly illustrates the sequence of phases in its life cycle.



**Figure 2:** Dynamic model of development of therapeutic alliance (compiled by the author based on [11]).

The foundation of the model under consideration is the Rupture–Repair dynamic. Ruptures (for example, related to misunderstandings, professional errors of the therapist, or client dissatisfaction) inevitably arise during prolonged interaction. The therapist’s ability to promptly identify such disruptions and constructively neutralize them—through apologies, compensatory measures, or detailed discussion of the difficulties encountered—proves crucial. Such an approach not only restores the relationship to its previous level but often strengthens trust, elevating the alliance to a new stage of development [11]. The absence of adequate rupture management, however, leads to the undermining of the therapeutic alliance and loss of the client. In aggregate, the obtained results form a coherent analytical paradigm in which the therapeutic alliance serves not merely as a figurative metaphor but as a full-fledged instrument for the decomposition of complex interaction processes and the focusing of managerial efforts on the key element—the depth of human connection.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the course of the study, the stated objective was successfully achieved: an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of the therapeutic alliance and its impact on client retention in the personal services industry was conducted. Through the consolidation and synthesis of existing theoretical approaches, an adapted model was proposed that provides a conceptual description and systematization of the phenomenon under consideration in a commercial context.

The results fully confirm the initial hypothesis: the application of Bordin’s three-component alliance model in the service sector demonstrated methodological correctness and practical effectiveness. As a conclusion, a hierarchy of the significance of the alliance elements was established, in which the affective component—the emotional bond between the specialist and the client—occupies the leading position. This element, encompassing trust, empathy, and psychological comfort, proves to be more influential for behavioral retention than the functional aspects of goal and task alignment.

The scientific novelty of the work lies in the proposal of an interdisciplinary model that combines psychological concepts with marketing tools and introduces a new language for describing and managing client relationships. The practical significance is expressed in defining priorities for personnel training in the service sector: investments in the development of soft skills—active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, and alliance repair—appear to be the optimal strategy for increasing client loyalty and strengthening the competitive advantages of a business. Prospects for further research are seen in the empirical validation of the proposed model through experiments in various market segments, as well as in the study of the influence of cultural factors on the specifics of forming the therapeutic alliance.

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