

COMPETENCY MAPPING FOR A SALES AND MARKETING FORCE: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The consumers of x and y generation have plenty of information in their door step. Their buying behaviour is quite unpredictable. They throw unimaginable challenges to the marketer of products and services. The marketing and selling functions cannot be static. To retain or reap the success, marketers should march ahead of unpredictable consumers as well as aggressively operating competitors. The methods, tools and technologies of marketing and selling should be adept to the prevailing situations. From this perspective, Drafting of competency mapping for sales and marketing executives plays a crucial role. It has to be carefully sketched to fulfill the requirements and responsibilities emerging in the complexed environment. Time and again it has to be revisited to make it compatible and practicable. Carefully drawn competency mapping will keep a company's sales force marching ahead of its competitors.

KEYTERMS: Competency, Competency Mapping and Sales Force

INTRODUCTION

We are living in the hi-tech world where technologies are replaced by new and upgraded one on daily basis. The unimaginable explosion of information and communication technologies in the form of television with innumerable channels, internet with abundant wealth of information and mobiles with multiple purposes has brought plenty of information to the door steps of consumers. The consumers are market literate and they are more informed than ever before. They cannot be blindly brainwashed to buy a product or to avail service. They collect information and actively evaluate them before making buying decisions. They judiciously evaluate the choices before them and personalise the utilities of the products or services. They are not blindly brand loyal. It is very difficult for the marketers today to make the consumers to have a look at their product and services. They are also living in a complexed environment where innumerable factors influence the buying decision. Once there was a situation, where a producer produced any product and comfortably disposed them to consumers who had no other choices and lived with limited information. But, in the current scenario, he cannot adopt the same strategy. He has to feel the pulses of consumers. The products and services marketed by him should be the bundle of needs, feelings and aspirations of consumers. He has to take plenty of efforts to prove him to the ultimate consumers by competing with others who are equally competent and highly aggressive in their approaches. He has to go along with the blooming technologies of production, marketing and communication. The marketing function has become a centric of any organisation and fast evolving one. From this perspective, Drafting of competency mapping for sales and marketing executives plays a crucial role. It has to be carefully sketched to fulfill the requirements and responsibilities emerging in the complexed environment. Time and again it has to be revisited to make it compatible and practicable. Carefully drawn competency mapping will keep a company's sales force marching ahead of its competitors.

Recent Scenario of Sales and Marketing

As demographic and socio economic characteristics of consumers keep on changing from time to time, it is imperative for the top brass to visit the competencies to be inculcated in its sales force. The sales force from top to bottom should sensitise itself with the growing expectations of consumers. Nowadays consumers would like to personalise the products and services he would like to consume. Brands of products and services should be emotionally and sociably linked to consumers. They should be engaged with a personal touch. Digitalisation of every operation is essentially inevitable as everyone use internet fluently. Establishing connections and floating information in the social network websites has become order of the day. Mobile phone of every individual is going smart, therefore the contents, the company would like to display should become smarter with appropriate visual contents. Markets should be demargated into micro units. Judicial integration of products and services without diluting the basic features are essentially important. Markets for products and services extend beyond the borders and are actively globalised.

Creativity and innovation are to be effected undoubtedly in every aspect and action. Developing a win-win relationship with consumers is highly desired. Contacts should be established with customers time and again through various modes to sensitise their pulses and act appropriately. Marketers are nowadays expected to be problem solvers rather than product pushers. The tele callers are expected to go beyond the script while talking to consumers. They should be ready with viable solutions that can really solve the problems and feed consumers with tips to give benefits in multifold. Every activity the sales force does, should add values to consumers. After sales services should be highly individualised. As the corporate is thriving for higher profit margins, it is imperative for the sales force to cut down the costs of its operations in the scenario of acute competitions and fluctuating economic situations. Regulations of countries are updated and made adoptive to the growing situations. The scurtiny is personalised. As the marketers are competing with each other on equal foot, it is very difficult for them to differentiate the products and services from one another. It is also very difficult to understand, how buyers are making decisions in the present scenario as it is becoming more and more complex and unpredictable.

In a survey conducted by Accenture, it was found that the most of the Chief sales officers opined that their main objective in the organization to improve the effectiveness of their own sales force. It also understood that the majority of the sales force fails to meet the sales targets. Sales force turnover ratio is also high. Around 40 % of the CSOs feel that the companies fail to identify and recruit the talented sales force. (CSO Insights, "2009 Sales Performance Optimization Survey & Analysis," March 2009)

Suman & Vibuti (2010) in a study conducted to identify the reasons for the sales force turnover in Indian insurance sector on 350 employees and ex employees of insurance sector, identify better job opportunity, better salary, target pressures, no time for the family, relocation and bad work environment as the important reasons for high sales force turnover in the insurance sector in India.

GSK of USA has revisited its system of evaluating and compensating sales professional on sales target and replaced it with bonuses payable on customer feedback and adherence to company policy.

The challenging environment of pharmaceutical companies has forced them to redefine their approach towards the sales force; they would like to have a committed sales force as attrition rate is very high in the industry. They also want to recruit clinically effective medical representatives who can give a clear picture of the product.

They expect their medical representatives to be highly informative and knowledgeable of product, market and competitors (M. K. Karajgikar 2011)

The emerging trends of health care system transforms the roles played by sales force in this sector. Patients are highly informed and are well aware of health problems and treatments and strong stakeholders, Mushrooming growth of private and corporate health care delivery systems, exploding growth of health insurance, increasing number of organized forms of pharmaceutical retail chains, generic forms of medicines and mass advertising for medicines are changing the roles of sales force in pharmaceutical companies (Amardeep Udeshi 2011, for IMS consulting group).

Sales Force Competencies

A person is said to be competent in doing a job when he excels by not only fulfilling the expectations but also exceeding the same. A job assigned to him, has different forms of expectations and aspirations of various groups of people within the organisation but also from the outside. He should possess the knowledge, behaviours, attitudes and skills which in toto called competencies that can mold and direct him in completing the job by making himself and people around him happy. One's abilities and characteristics that can lead to a superior performance in a job within an organisation are called competencies. Identifying and assessing the competencies, is of a great help to attain the objectives of the job and to enable the individuals to grow to their or beyond their potentials. In the present scenario, anyone who is entrusted with the selling or marketing function should possess different set of skills, abilities and characters to win customers for the products or services of his company. Selling or marketing is quite different from one product or service to other. Even for a product, its sales force should come across different groups of consumers who are varying in aspirations and needs as they are different from one another in socio, cultural and economic backgrounds. As consumers' outlook and perceptions change from time to time, the companies cannot always target the same group to sell their products and services. Sales force has the capacity to decide the future destiny of the company. It is therefore imperative for the companies to keep it well equipped to foresee the future with great accuracy and design the marketing strategies by getting into the shoes of consumers.

A sales force is expected to be blessed with creativity, sensitivity, adaptability, communicative skills, analytical skills, foresightedness, progressive, commitment, flexibility etc. It has to adopt a down to earth approach which can help it to feel with the consumers and acknowledge their feelings, aspirations and needs. It has to keep consumers in the heart and the products and services giving them value in the mind. It should have the capacity to think about, design and implement selling or marketing activities ahead of competitors.

Sales Force Competency Mapping

A properly recruited, trained, well equipped, highly motivated, and adequately paid workforce can make its organisation to stay at top. Competency mapping as a tool comes handy to an organisation which wants to keep its human capital as a formidable force, winning combination and trend setters. A properly drafted competency mapping with futuristic view for any job can help the company to recruit, train, motivate, mold and develop right persons for the said job. It also clearly provides a clear draft of competencies expected to be inculcated in aspiring persons for the job. Competency mapping is usually drawn for any job based on three criteria namely functional knowledge, functional skills and behavioural traits. John Sergeant Associates have given ten competencies for a competency mapping of a sales force namely, Category developer, planner and implementer, commercial decision maker, leveraging relationship, adding value to customers' businesses, maximising mutual profit, concise and inspiring communicator, commitment to continuous

learning and guardian of the culture. American society of Training and development has developed their world class sales competency model on different levels such as sales fundamentals, sales processes, sales relationships, sales technology and sales performance.

Richa Nanda in her assessment report on talent management for Thomson Routers identifies that competencies can be categorised as critical, support and sustaining components. She introspects the following competencies such as thinking like a customer, creating strategic direction, leveraging business acumen, driving innovation, driving for results, leading change, managing across boundaries, developing talent, building relationship and acting with integrity. Of them driving for results, thinking like a customer and creating strategic direction are identified as critical factors. Managing across boundaries, leveraging business acumen, building relationships and leading change are seen as support factors. Sustaining factors are acting with integrity, developing talent and driving innovation.

In a research study conducted by Aspiring minds in the process of developing a nine factor competency model for sales executives in different forms of sales, it is found that communication skills, being diligent, reliable, result oriented, socially confident, influential and charismatic are highly desirable in the case of Sales persons in B2B model. For B2C model of sales, executives are very much expected to be optimistic, resilient, natural people's person and socially confident. For Channels sales people being optimistic, resilient, multitasking, natural people's person are the well rated competencies. It is also depicted that English communication skill along with conscientiousness and extraversion can be greatly helpful for being successful at the entry level.

Sales people in Pharmaceutical industry are expected to remodel their role as Key account managers, relationship representatives, sample droppers, handling of multi channels and multi clients, effective use of technology, atomistic targeting and evidence based decision making (Amardeep Udeshi 2011, for IMS consulting group).

Asiegbu et al (2011) conducted a study on sales force competence development and marketing performance of industrial and domestic products firms in Nigeria by soliciting the responses from marketing managers. From the study it is crystal clear that individual and group development is to focussed to enhance competencies, sales people should be effectively mentored to inculcate and improve selling skills, to properly counsel to identify different forms of behaviour of present and prospective consumers and coach them to gain exposure on market, evolving needs of consumers and die hard competitors in order to effect sales growth which results in sales volume and profitability.

Nagaraju and Sathyanarayana (2012) in the study conducted on competency mapping strategies at selected organisations in Bangalore express that competency facilitates the superior performance of the organisations as a whole. Sustained competencies provide a competitive edge.

Mark Marone and Chris Blauth (2011) in the online survey conducted on 1045 sales professionals belonging to B2B and B2C across different countries, it is inferred that high performers feel that intensive and extensive knowledge of products/services sold, having in-depth knowledge of customer's industry and his needs, exploring new opportunities in existing accounts, conducting of in-depth research of prospect organisations, assuring and reassuring the consumers on the fulfilment of promises and exhibiting sales tenacity are the keys in their success.

Meticulously drafted competency mapping can imbibe right skills, knowledge, attributes and abilities in the work force which can be crucial in achieving overall organisational goals and sustainable development in human capital. As the job of sales force is highly demanding, the competency mapping helps to identify the right persons at the time of

recruitment. It also helps to sense the difference between the existing talent pool and the required set of talents. To bridge the gap, it enables us to identify the suitable mechanism which can inculcate the desired skill sets, awareness and ability to develop by oneself. Competency mapping is said to help in the identification of future leaders who are capable of taking the organisation to march ahead. It also gives a blue print for selecting right candidates, coaching them with opt methods and techniques and mentor them to imbibe desired values and characteristics.

CONCLUSIONS

In the globalised era, cultural, socio and economic indicators are gradually becoming universal. Consumers' attitudes and needs are rapidly changing with complexities that hinder the prediction and delivery of right products and services. With plenty of money available for proactive entrepreneurs to compete for a better share with one another, they actively engage in several activities primly research and development to design and deliver products which can be placed as unique one in the minds of consumers. Technology developers are busy round the clock to deliver improved products and services to consumers. Products or services in the present distribution basket can become quite outdated and obsolete. Information kits are floated every nook and corner via Internet which has adopted itself to different types of devices with ease. Talent pool available in the market is in scarce and highly competed. In this scenario, it is quite challenging to develop a competency mapping that can fit and flexible to the in the revolving environment. As sales force of a company can decide its enduring success in the modern era, drawing a competency map can keep it intact to perform in any circumstances they come across. It can be highly prospective for an organisation which is highly ambitious. Its fruits are not without vehement challenges. By adopting right set of tools, methods and mechanisms, it can be effectively groomed.

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