
Challenges Of The Adoption Of Motivational Strategies On Sales Force Performance (A Study Of Selected Firms In Aba, Abia State)

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Abstract

Current development in the field of marketing shows that despite the advances as motivational incentive packages of many organizations, personnel in sales and selling activities do not achieve targets and most prefer being self employed and or transferred from one firm to another. The management would benefit from the challenges from the study mostly because it will give them sense of direction on how best to stimulate their sales workers whom it is their responsibility to push their products to the consumers. This is evident mostly when one considers the present economic situation in which there is a lot of unsold stocks, demand is very low, consumer resistance is very prevalent, liquidity in terms of cash within the economy is poor and this generally hardship in the country. This study investigates the challenges of adoption of motivational strategies on performance of sales force in some Aba-based firms.

Keywords: Firms, Adoption, Motivation, Strategies, challenges

Introduction

Creating and maintaining a well-motivated sales force is a challenging task. The confidence and motivation of sales people are being constantly worn down by the inevitable rejections they suffer from buyers as part of everyday activities. In some fields, notably, the life insurance,

rejections may greatly outnumber successes; thus motivation may be a major problem. This is compounded by the fact that the salesperson and his supervisor are normally geographically separated, so the salesperson may feel isolated or even neglected unless management pays particular attention to motivational

strategies which take account of his or her needs.

It is critical that sales managers appreciate that motivation is far more sophisticated than the view that all salespeople need is a ‘kick up the pants’. Effective motivation requires a deep understanding of salespeople as individuals, their personalities and value system. In a sense, sales managers do not motivate salespeople. What they do is provide the circumstances that will encourage salespeople to motivate themselves.

An understanding of motivation lies in the relationship between needs, drives and goals. The basic process involves needs (deprivation) which set drives in motion (deprivation with direction) to accomplish goals (anything which alleviates a need and reduces a drive), (Maslow, 2003). Thus a need resulting from a lack of friends sets up a drive for affiliation which is designed to obtain friends”. In a work context, the need for more money may result in a drive to

work harder in order to obtain increased pay. Improving motivation is important to sales success as research conducted by Pullins (2001) has shown that high levels of motivation lead to:

- Increased creativity
- Working smarter and more adaptive selling approach
- Working harder
- Increased use of win-win negotiation tactics
- Higher self-esteem
- A more relaxed attitude and a less negative emotional tone
- Enhancement of relationships

The sales executive’s job is to get results through company personnel – by making decisions and seeing to it that others carry them out. In other words, the sales executive’s performance depends upon the composite performances of the individuals making up the sales force. No wonder, then, that sales executives are greatly interested in the factors influencing individual sales personnel to achieve given performance

levels. What causes a salesperson to achieve a given performance level? Native ability, or potential, has something to do with it – no one achieves more than they are capable of achieving. The skills that come with experience, education, and training influence performance for the salesperson; this means knowing the job objectives and how to achieve them. The amount and effectiveness of effort expended by the individual impacts importantly upon performance (Nnedu, 2006).

Assuming that a salesperson has the requisite ability and the skills needed for satisfactory job performance, what causes that salesperson to expend the necessary effort? The answer is locked up in the behavioural concept known as motivation – what causes people to behave as they do? Behavioural scientists agree that motivation is goal-directed behaviour aimed toward achieving given results, which in turn, provide rewards in line with the goal. High productivity in a sales force comes about neither naturally nor accidentally. Some

sales personnel are self starters, requiring little external incentive, but they are the exceptions. Most sales personnel require motivation to reach and maintain satisfactory performance levels (Still, Tanner Jr and Castleberry, 2008).

Motivation is goal-directed behaviour, underlying which are certain needs or desires. The term “needs” according to Still, Tanner Jr, Castleberry (2008), suggest a lack of something that reaching the goal could satisfy, while the term “desire” suggests positive ardor and strength of feeling. The complex of needs and desires stemming from within individuals’ leads them to act so as to satisfy needs and desires. Specifically, as applied to sales personnel, motivation is the amount of effort the salesperson desires to expend on the activities associated with the sales job, such as calling on potential accounts, planning sales presentations, and filing reports (Still, Tanner Jr and Castleberry, 2008). In addition would be expending on each activity making up the sales volume,

profitability, sales to new accounts, quota attainment, and the like.

The question is, what are the outcomes of adopting motivational strategies on sales personnel performance? The status of these motivational strategies in the beverage organizations seems adequately however, its impact on the performance of the sales people is yet to ascertain. The strategies include salary plus incentive in the form of bonus or commission sales context with desirable price, improvement of organizational climate, privilege pay, and power pay among others.

Purpose of the Study

1. To determine whether the beverage firms in Aba apply motivational strategies on their sales force.
2. To determine which motivational strategies are often applied by these firms.
3. To determine the impact of sales contests and sales efforts deployed by sales personnel. **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses have been put forward to guide the study:

H₀₁: Co-partnership with sales personnel does not serve significant motivational purpose among sales force.

H₀₂: Integration of sales personnel family members in incentive package does not sustain force morale.

Review Of Related Literature

Motivation is concerned with the “why” of human behaviour. Why do people do things? It has been defined as all those inner striving conditions described as wishes, desires, etc. It is an inner state that activates or moves behaviour (Berelson and Steiner 2014). From a manager’s perspective, a person who is motivated:

- Works hard
- Sustains a pace of hard work
- Has self directed behaviour toward important goals.

Thus, motivation involves efforts, persistence and goals (Petri, 2011). It involves a person’s desire to perform. The actual performance is what managers can

evaluate to determine indirectly the person's desire. When a person's performance is determined to be unsatisfactory, low motivation is often considered the problem. Motivation involves certain practices which is the kernel of this study. In order to achieve the research objectives, our review of literature will cover the following areas:

- (i) Reasons for sales force motivation
- (ii) Theories for motivating sales force
- (iii) Motivational strategies
- (iv) Management strategies for increasing motivation
- (v) Tool of motivation
- (vi) Sales personnel performance evaluation
- (vii) Salesperson performance evaluation

Conceptual / Theoretical Framework / Historical Survey

Most sales personnel require motivational "help" from management to reach and maintain acceptable performance levels. They require motivation as individuals and as group members. As individuals, they are targets for personalized motivational efforts

by their superiors. As members of the sales force, they are target for sales management efforts selling them. Four aspects of the sales of the salesperson's job affect the quality of his performance. The following discussion focuses on these aspects; each is an important reason why sales personnel require additional motivation as outlined by Still, Herricks and Chester (2008).

(a) Inherent nature of the sales job:

Although sales jobs vary from one company to another, sales jobs are alike in certain respects. Every sales job is a succession of ups and downs, a series of experiences resulting in alternating feelings of exhilaration and depression. In the course of a day's work, salespersons interest with many pleasant and courteous people, but some are unpleasant and rude and are difficult to deal with. They are frustrated, particularly when aggressive competing sales personnel vie of the same business, and they meet numerous turndowns. Furthermore, sales personnel spend not only working time but considerable

after-hours time away from home, causing them to miss many attractive parts of family life. These conditions cause salespersons to become discouraged, to achieve low performance levels, or even to seek non selling positions. The inherent nature of the sales job, then, is the first reason that additional motivation is required.

(b) Salesperson's boundary position and role conflict: The sales person occupies "boundary position" in the company and must try to satisfy the expectation of people both within the company (in the sales department and elsewhere) and in customer organizations. There is a linkage with four groups.

- i) Sales management
- ii) The company organization that handles order fulfillment
- iii) The customers and
- iv) Other company sales personnel

Each group imposes certain behavioural expectations on the salesperson, and in

playing these different roles, the sales person faces role conflicts such as:

(1) **Conflict of identification:** This rises out of multi-group membership. On returning to the company, the salesperson drop identification with the customer and identifies with the company.

(2) **Advocacy conflict:** This occurs when the sales person identifies with the customer and advocates the customer's position to other groups in the company organization. This may be important and may be encouraged by the sales management group, but the advocate is a difficult position.

(3) **Conflict is inherent in the salesperson's dual role as an advocate:** For both the customer and the company and the salesperson's pecuniary interest as an entrepreneur. As an entrepreneur paid directly or indirectly on the basis of sales volume, the salesperson has an interest in selling

as much as possible in the shortest time. However, the salesperson may uncover facts overlooked or unknown to the customer, indicating that difficulties in the customer's organization limit the product's usefulness. If the salesperson tells the customer about these conditions and that, in all probability, the product will not meet the customer's needs, the salesperson risks losing the sale and the income that goes with it.

Not much can be done to reduce the role conflict of sales personnel. (4)

Some evidence exists that experienced sales personnel perceive significantly less role conflict than those with less experience. This suggests that a salesperson's perceptions of, and ability to cope with role conflict are influenced not only by experience but by the effectiveness of sales training. It also suggests that those

who become experienced sales personnel may cope better with role conflicts (that is psychologically) than those leaving the sales organization earlier. So improving sales training effectiveness and revising selection criteria are two roads to reducing the impact of role conflict on sales force morale.

Role conflicts traceable to the salesperson's linkage with groups that have divergent interest, then, is another reason why additional motivation is required.

Tendency toward apathy: Some sales personnel naturally become apathetic, get into a rut. Those who, year after year, cover the same territory and virtually the same customers, lose interest and enthusiasm. Gradually their calls degenerate into routine order taking. Because they know the customer so well, they believe that good salesmanship is no longer

necessary. Their customer approach typically becomes: “Do you need anything today, John?” They fail to recognize that friendship in no way obviates the necessity for creative selling and that most customers do not sell themselves on new products and applications. The customer’s response, as often as not is: “Nothing today, Larry”. Later a competing salesperson calls on the same account uses effective sales techniques, and gets an order. Many sales people require additional motivation to generate renewed interest in their work.

- (5) **Maintaining a feel of group identity:** The sales person working along finds it difficult to develop and maintain a feeling of group identity with other company salespeople. Team spirit, if present at all, is weak. Thus, the contagious enthusiasm – conducive to

improving the entire group’s performance – does not develop.

If sales management, through providing added motivation, succeeds in developing and maintaining team spirit, individual’s sales personnel strive to meet group performance standards. Few people who consider themselves members of the sales team want to appear as poor performers in the eyes of their colleagues. Providing the kind of working atmosphere in which all members of the sales force feel they are participating in a cooperative endeavour is not easy – nevertheless, effective sales management works continuously to achieve and maintain it.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted in the course of this study is the quasi-experimental research design. The field study type of cross-sectional survey design was used as it made it convenient for the researcher to employ the use of questionnaire, personal interview etc, in collecting the requisite

data for the study. Tables, charts and percentages were used in data presentation while the spearman correlation coefficient test tool was used for hypotheses testing. Dependent variable as sales forces performance was compared with independent variable of incentive package items.

Sample and Sampling Technique

As rightly pointed out by Ezejelue and Ogwo (2000), there is often no satisfactory generalization on what sample size should be. They went further by maintaining that the sample size should be dependent upon what use is to be made of the results and what precision the researcher desires. The researcher fairly convinced that a sample of 128 is reasonable enough to generate the relevant information needed.

Data Presentation, Analysis And Results

In this chapter, the researcher carefully present, analyze and interpret the data collected for the study. The main thrust of the study is to determine if motivational strategies significantly influence sales

personnel performance. With the use of personal interview and questionnaire, data have been collected; analyzed and interpreted using predetermined statistical tool Spearman's Rank Co-efficient, simple percentages and tables as contained in chapter three. This, the researcher believe will help us in drawing relevant conclusions, as well as proffer necessary recommendations. Copies of questionnaire were personally administered by the researcher to 180 sales executives, sales supervisors, etc of selected firms in Aba. A total of 128 usable copies of the questionnaires were received. This represents 71.11% of the administered questionnaire.

Data Presentation

Data collected sequel to the distribution of questionnaire are presented thus:

Questionnaire distribution and collection

Table 4.1 shows the distribution and retrieval of research questionnaire

Table 4.1

Firms	Number sent	Number collected	Percentage
Nigeria Breweries Plc	30	30	100
Unilever Nigeria Plc	25	25	100
PZ Nigeria Plc	12	12	100
Nig. Bottling Company Plc	11	11	100
Korama Clover Ind. Ltd	24	24	100
Total	128	128	66.41

Percentage rate of return

Source: Primary data 2023

Source: Field survey 2023. A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed and 128 (71:11%) percentage were returned. The percentage return is high enough to guarantee the validity of the research result.

Analysis shows that 85 (66.41%) respondents indicated that their companies had engaged in the motivation of sales personnel while 43 (33.59%) respondents said that their companies had not motivated the sales personnel. Majority of the respondents felt that the companies motivated their sales staff.

Whether or not companies ever engaged in motivation of sales force

Table 4.2 below presents respondents opinion in whether or not their employees adopt sales force motivation strategies.

Table 4.2

Firms	Yes	No	Total
Nigeria Breweries Plc	20	10	30

Motivation and effect on sales force efforts

Table 4.3 below contains respondents' opinion on the impact of sales force motivation strategies on sales return.

Table 4.3

Firms	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	No comments	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	Total
Nigeria Breweries Plc	8	15	2	3	2	30
Unilever Nig Plc	8	10	3	2	2	25
PZ Nig Plc	2	4	2	2	2	12
Nig. Bottling Comp. Plc	3	12	2	2	2	21
Nestle Nig. Plc	5	13	2	2	2	24
Korama Clover Ind Nig Ltd	2	8	2	2	2	16
Total	28	62	13	13	12	128
Response rate%	21.87	48.46	10.15	10.15	9.37	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

Analysis shows that 28 (21.87%) respondents strongly agreed that motivation and effect on their sales efforts, 62 (48.46%) agreed, 13 (10.15%) respondents made no comment, 13 (10.15%) disagreed while 12 (9.37%) respondents strongly disagreed. It does not mean that 90 (70.33%) of the respondents agreed that the level of motivation affected their sales efforts.

Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with

Hypotheses Testing

The test hypothesis aid in decision making and it enhances the decision making. This section is devoted to test these hypotheses stated in chapter one. The hypotheses are tested using the statistical tools. One of the statistical tools is Spearman's Rank

Correlation. According to Blasé and Brase (2007), in the 1900s Charles Spearman University of London developed the technique that now bears his name. The Spearman test of rank correlation requires us to use ranked variables. The Spearman test only checks on the existence of a monotone relationship between the variables. A relationship between two variables X and Y, in which (i) as X increase, Y also decreases of (ii) as X increase, Y also decreases. Onyenakeya (2001) asserts that this statistical technique is used in establishing the strength or otherwise of relationship between two variables say X and Y by conducting a

correlation coefficient the higher the value of the correlation, the stronger the relationship and vice-versa.

The formula for this statistical technique is

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6\sum d^2}{n(n^2-1)}$$

Source: Ogbuji, C.N. (2005), unpublished.

$r_s = R_x - R_y$ (difference between the Rank of X and Y)

n = number of element in the rank table

The Spearman rank correlation coefficient

(r_s) has the following important properties

$-1 \leq r_s \leq 1$. If $r_s = -1$, the relationship between X and Y is perfectly decreasing. If

$r_s = 1$, the relationship between X and Y is perfectly increasing. Values of r_s close to 1

or -1 indicate for X and Y to have a relationship increasing or decreasing as the

case may be, and values of r close to 0 indicate a very weak or perhaps non

existent relationship. Having stated the above, we will now following the procedure

to test our hypotheses.

Testing Hypotheses 1:

Null hypothesis (H_{01}): Co-partnership with sales personnel does not serve significant motivational purpose among sales force.

Alternate hypothesis (H_{11}): Co-partnership with sales personnel serve significant motivational purpose among sales force.

To test hypothesis 1, data contained in table 4.9 was used.

Thus:

Table 4.12 Calculation of rank correlation coefficient for hypothesis 1

No	R_x	R_y
10	2	1
12	1	4
2	6	6
6	4	3
8	3	2
5	5	5
43		85

Source: Questions 8 in the questionnaire (table 4.9)

By applying the formula

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6\sum d^2}{n(n^2-1)}$$

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6(12)}{6(36-1)}$$

$$= 1 - \frac{72}{6(35)}$$

$$= 1 - \frac{72}{210}$$

$$= 1 - 0.34$$

$$r_s = 0.66$$

Decision rule

Since the value of $r_s = 0.66$ which tends toward 1, it shows that co-partnership with sales personnel serve significant motivational purpose among sales force. H_0 is therefore rejected and H_1 is accepted. It means that co-partnership with sales personnel serve significant motivational purpose among sales force.

Testing Hypothesis 2:

Null hypothesis (H_{02}): Integration of sales personnel family members incentive package does not sustain sales force morale.

Alternate hypothesis (H_{12}): Integration of sales personnel family members incentive package sustain sales force morale.

To test hypothesis two (2), data contained in table 4.10 was used. Thus:

Table 4.13 Calculation of rank correlation coefficient for hypothesis 2

$\frac{No}{X}$	Rx	$\frac{Yes}{Y}$	Ry
15	1	15	1
11	3	14	2
4	6	8	6
8	4	13	3
12	2	12	4
5	5	11	5
55		73	

Source: Questions 10 in the questionnaire (table 4.10)

By applying the formula

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6\sum d^2}{n(n^2-1)}$$

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6(6)}{6(36-1)}$$

$$= 1 - \frac{36}{6(35)}$$

$$= 1 - \frac{36}{210}$$

$$= 1 - 0.17$$

$$r_s = 0.83 \text{ or } 83\%$$

Decision rule

Since the value of $r_s = 0.83$ or 83% which tends toward 1, it shows that there is an integration of sales personnel family members in incentive package sustain sales force morale. H_{02} is therefore rejected and H_{12} is accepted.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussions of Results

A study into sales force practice commissioned by the Chartered Institute of Marketing asked sales managers to rank eight factors (excluding salary, bonus or commission) that could be effective in stimulating their salespeople to better their usual performance (PA Consultants, 2009). Individual meetings between manager and salesperson were thought to be the most effective of the eight factors investigated. Sales contests and competitions were ranked only sixth in importance, although a more detailed analysis of the answers

revealed that motivation was ranked first among the consumer goods companies replying to the questionnaire. Surveys by Shipley et al (2008) investigated factors satisfaction from doing a good job was ranked as the top motivator. Achieving targets and acknowledgement of effort were also highly ranked by both industrial and consumer salespeople. However, a major difference was the factor 'satisfy customer needs', with industrial salespeople ranking it second, while their consumer counterparts ranked it only sixth. The difference between industrial and consumer products and customers probably explains the discrepancy, with the former selling more technical products to customers with one complex needs. Some of these factors, along with financial incentives, will now be evaluated in terms of their potential to motivate. Most companies whether selling consumer or industrial goods, pay commission or bonus to their salespeople. The most usual form of payment is the salary plus commission system since this provides a level of security plus the

incentive of higher earnings for higher sales. However, in some instances salespeople are paid on a straight commission basis that earnings are entirely dependent upon achievement.

Conclusion

It should therefore be concluded that although firms employ a lot of strategies in motivating their sales force, the one that is prevalent is salary plus incentive such as bonus, commission, etc. In effect, motivational strategies significantly influence sales personnel performance measured in terms of sales revenue achieved, number of calls made.

Limitations of the Study

Inadequate fund is one of the limitations of this research study. Again not all the firms in Aba were included in the sample. There may be possibility of sampling error or sampling bias. For a study of this nature, it would perhaps have been better to go beyond Abia State. There may likely be chance of selection bias or sampling error. Our data collection method may also have its own problem. The data presentation

method and hypotheses testing tool, among others may have their minor drawbacks.

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