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Hiring the Right Sales Force for Peak Performance

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Abstract:

The political stability in Ghana since 1992 resulted in the liberalisation of the economy, which in turn impacted favourably on business activities. This has resulted in escalating competition and rising buyer expectations forcing companies to focus on quality service delivery to a greater extent than ever before. These trends have increased the intensity of competition in the beer industry particularly. As a consequence, many firms in the beer industry strive to nurture or build customer trust and retention which largely depends on sales force behaviour. At the same time, hiring the right sales force to deliver on sales goals and targets for shareholder value in a competitive environment can be challenging.

Therefore, using, a two-phase survey with managers and sales persons from the Ghanaian beer industry, this paper examined how the right sales force could be hired for peak performance. It came out from the findings that, to think that there is a quick solution to the difficult job of recruiting sales persons can be an illusion. What may work is for managers to collaborate closely with hiring consultants who have requisite capability in such matters. This collaboration can be in the form of managers sharing with consultants the required job related information from which to base their search. Once the task of hiring is no more directly the responsibility of managers, they can focus on their core management duties of training, mentoring, supervision and creating an enabling work environment to get sales persons work enthusiastically at achieving satisfactory results.

Keywords: Sales force recruitment, retention and peak performance.

1. Introduction

The political stability experienced in the Ghanaian economy since 1992 resulted in the liberalisation of the economy, which in turn has impacted favourably on business activities. This has resulted in escalating competition and rising buyer expectations forcing companies to focus on quality delivery of services. The consequence of this has been an effort by firms to nurture or build customer trust and retention, which largely depends on sales force behaviour (i.e., Paolo, 2002).

The role and importance of the sales force in meeting the challenge of creating this competitiveness has been argued. Shepherd (1999) argues a firm's sales force as critical to service delivery and competitiveness. The sales force is the most fundamental channel through which money flows into the firm (Malaysian Business, 2002). Similarly, Sharma, (2001) underscores the importance of sales persons with the position that they are the eyes and ears of the firm; and performing a variety of roles to include-business communications, resolution of disputes, asset managers and advocates.

At the same time, hiring the right sales force to deliver on sales goals and targets in a competitive environment can be challenging. This papers aims to explore sales force recruitment as applied in the wider world and in the context of the Ghanaian beer industry. Specifically, in this paper, how to hire the right sales force to meet the challenge of creating competitiveness is examined. In next to follow, the literature related to sales force recruitment is reviewed. This is followed by the methodology through which data was collected to illuminate the research topic. Then in the concluding part, we discuss the results, and offer recommendations.

2. Literature Review

Baker, (2001) asserts that the first step in any research project must be to establish what is already known about the topic or problem as knowledge accumulates over time. To this end, the review begins with an exploration of the processes and techniques involved in hiring sales persons. The focus is on personal interviews, personality test and hiring from the competition, as these techniques appear to be popular in the Ghana.

2.1. Hiring the Right Person

Randall and Randall, (2001) argue the selection of successful sales people as the most important decision facing sales management as it constitutes the greatest costs to the firm. Additionally, the job of recruiting the sales force can be challenging as they are a critical component in the long-term competitive strategy for most firms (Olson, Cravens, & Slater, 2001).

This notwithstanding, Behrenz, (2001 p: 257) argue hiring decisions are taken under uncertainty, as the productivity of the job applicant is not directly observable during the selection processes. Moreover, and that an employer who hires or retains the wrong

person has liability for work place violence committed to employees, customers and others who might suffer assault and harassment (Zugelder, Maurer, & Champagne, 1999).

They cite theories to support their argument (p: 46):

- a) The *respondet superior*; premised on the ancient "master/servant" employment relationship where vicarious liability is imposed on the employer for negligent or wrongful conduct of an employee within the scope of the employer's premises whiles furthering the purpose of the employer.
- b) Negligent hiring and retention, where actions are brought against the employer for negligence in hiring and retaining the wrong person.

According to Paul Peter and Donnelly, (2001), the hiring procedure is as follows: a) job analysis and description to establish the job requirements and duties; b) the determination of qualifications and the personality required; c) a search through sources that could begin from the recruiter's company, through educational institutions, the competition and end at employment agencies; and d) invitation and processing of applications for short listing, interviewing and final selection.

2.2. Job Analysis

Randall and Randall (2001) argue that as part of the selection process, a thorough job analysis should be conducted to provide documented information of skills, knowledge, and abilities required for the job. Similarly, Muller and Belcher (2000) argue the purpose of job analysis to be the basis for human resource management decisions of job classification, setting of compensation levels, selection, placement, performance planning and evaluation. Behrenz, (2001, p: 256) calls it job planning, and involving the analysis of present and future needs of personnel, and a consideration of the differences in competencies and tasks.

2.3. Selection Techniques

Randall and Randall, (2001) proposes selection techniques for the sales force from which the manager can choose or mix from, as no one technique emerges as being overwhelmingly superior. They are as follows: personal interviews, bio-data analysis, assessment centres and simulation, letters of reference, reference checks, graphology, personality testing, blood type, physical appearance and hiring a competitor's sales representative.

2.3.1. Personal Interviews

Job interviews are the most common methods of employee selection with a goal to evaluate applicants' job-relevant skills, abilities and other characteristics (Evars, Neil, & Voskuil, 2005). Further, employers use job interviews as a technique to select applicants for managerial or supervisory positions (McFarland, Ann Marie, & Kriska, (2002). It is during the selection interview that interviewees provide a great deal of information, some of which may be non-verbal to influence hiring decisions (Burnett & Motowildo, 1998). The abilities, skills and characteristics that will be revealed in the interview may include effective interpersonal listening, empathy and communications skills which are critical for success in the sales context (Schultz & Evans 2002).

Additionally, Castleberry, Sheperd, & Ridnour, (1999) argue that job interviews can expose interpersonal listening which they described as the most important skill in the sales position, and that interpersonal listening is the "cognitive process of actively sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding to the verbal and non verbal messages of present or potential customers" (p: 31). The job interview may also expose empathy skills described by Comer and Drollinger (1999) as the "ability to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy, and with the emotional components and meanings as if one were the other person, but without ever losing the 'as if' condition" (p: 19).

However, Burnett and Motowildo (1998) posit that, in the interview setting, non-verbal cues can be manipulative and so may be productive or not. In their view, if the interviewee manipulates non verbal cues simply to impress, it may not necessarily be related to job performance. It may however be productive if it is used naturally, as in the case of a smile, eye contact, and physical appearance.

In the interview setting, a candidate's communications skills can also be assessed. Schultz and Evans (2002) underscore the importance of communication as a sales person trait by describing communication as the "glue" that holds relationships together (p: 19). Furthermore, Leigh and summers (2002) provides anecdotal evidence to support that speech fluency enhances perceptions of a sales person's competency, trustworthiness, and dynamism.

On the other hand, the usefulness and popularity of the job interview in employee selection has been questioned. Randall and Randall (2001) argue the use and efficacy of job interviews can be disappointing if interviewers have poor listening and poor questioning skills, or are inexperienced. To mitigate this potential weakness therefore, the authors suggest the use of patterned behaviour description (BD) where job applicants are required to react to a specific situation by describing a critical incident for the position; the use of trained and certified interviewers; and the structured interview approach.

Structured or standardised interview is broadly defined as any enhancement of the interview that is intended to increase psychometric properties to assist in determining what questions to ask and how to evaluate responses (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997). According to the authors, three components of structuring the interview should be based on reliability, validity and user reaction as a basis for evaluating the interview (p: 656):

Reliability;

- a) Test-retest reliability: to ensure the same interview content is elicited and the evaluation process is consistent.
- b) Interviewer reliability: to ensure the different interviewers elicit the same content and evaluation for every candidate.
- c) Candidate consistency: to ensure the interview elicits consistent responses from candidates.
- d) Interviewer-candidate interaction: to ensure the interactions between the interviewees and the interviewers are fairly equal.

- e) Internal consistency: to ensure the tools and atmosphere etc created for the interview is consistent for all the interviewees.
- f) Interviewer agreement: to ensure the interviewers all agree on their judgement, and thus making similar decisions.

Validity based on:

- a) Job-relatedness: to ensure the interview is related to the job for which the interviewee may perform when selected.
- b) Reduced deficiency: to ensure the interview elicits a large amount of useful information.
- c) Reduced contamination: to ensure faking or irrelevant information is prevented.

User reactions based on:

- a) Reduced bias: to ensure candidates will perceive the process as fair and not discriminatory.
- b) Candidate's reactions: to ensure they will perceive the process in a positive manner to enable referrals or even acceptance.
- c) Interviewer reactions: to ensure interviewers view the process positively.

2.3.2. Personality Test

Luthans (2002) argue personality trait as a human resource strength that has psychological capacity for development and effective performance management. Further, one important purpose of the interview is to assess a candidate's personality (Barrack, Patton, & Shanna, 2000). Furthermore, in the interview setting, non-verbal cues will influence inferences about personality traits and social impressions, including approachability, attractiveness, credibility and responsiveness (Leigh & Summers 2002). According to the authors, loudness, speech error, pitch, voice quality, silences, response latencies, eye contact, gesturing, postural relaxation, personal grooming, and colourfulness of clothing all have inferences concerning personality traits, psychological states and emotions (p: 43). Also, the degree to which interviewers typically assess personality can help clarify the potential benefits and limitations of the employment interview. Barrick, Mount, & Judge, (2001) cite Digman (1990) five-factor model of personality to classify personality as: a) extraversion (sociable, active, energetic); b) agreeableness (co-operative, considerate, trusting); c) conscientiousness (dependable, organised, persistent); d) Emotional stability (calm, secure, unemotional); and e) openness to experience (imaginative, intellectual, artistically sensitive).

2.3.3. Hiring from the Competition

According to Behrens, (2001), it serves some purpose to begin the search for sales persons from within, as opening up the competition for a position to external candidates reduces the chances of promotion for existing workers, and therefore their incentive to work harder (p: 260). Also, competition can be the place to poach for employees because most human resource professionals know that the best job candidates are those with several years of work experience and skills acquired while on the job (Leonard, 2001). Randall and Randall (2001) also claim that experienced sales persons who are familiar with products and operations of the industry, and who have proven record, may be poached from the competition.

At the same time, while it is normal to hire from the competition, how to attract and retain qualified candidates in a highly competitive labour market without preventing one's own intellectual capital from winding up in the hands of competitors is also challenging (Leonard, 2001). As a result, recruiters may have to search more extensively when filling positions requiring more education, experience and training (Behrens, 2001).

3. Methodology

Permission was granted by the firms concerned to conduct the study. Sales managers and Human resource managers were contacted in order to gain access to their organisations to conduct the study. This involved initial discussions on the research process and timelines; and as well discussions on questionnaire design, content and administration.

3.1. The Sample

The sample was drawn from the beer industry made up of two major players in the northern sector of Ghana (i.e., Ghana Breweries Limited (GBL) and Accra Brewery Limited (ABL). These firms together employ close to two hundred and fifty sales persons, some working for Key Account Customers popularly called Depot Contractors. As a result, a sufficient number of perspectives were included so that the measures correspond closely with reality, and also be able to yield the same results on other occasions (i.e., Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 2000).

In this direction, all Key Account Managers (KAM), two Human Resource Managers (HRM), Sales Managers (SDM), making a total of ten (10) managers, and sixty sales persons were included in the sample. The response rate for managers was 80% (eight managers), as it turned out that one Human Resource Manager was not available, and one Key Account Manager was on leave. The plan for sales persons drawn from all the three northern sales regions was sixty (60). However, the response rate was 93% or fifty-six (56) because some sales persons had taken their annual leave and others were on assignments.

3.2. Instruments

The study deployed self-administered questionnaires with an important goal of understanding the choices respondents make between alternative courses of action or objects (i.e., Krosnick 1999). Also, questionnaires are the most usual form of primary research; they have wider scope, and that it is logical, deterministic, and generally parsimonious (Baker, 2001, p: 386). The literature review enabled some insightful discoveries in terms of the concepts to be measured. In designing the questionnaires along the line of the literature however, suitable concepts were adapted to align the research process (i.e., Geursen, 2000). It was particularly important to adapt the questionnaires to suit respondents because their understanding of the questionnaires was critical to the study.

3.3. Data Collection

Zikmund (2000) argues that data collection was crucial and that the project was no better than the data collected in the field. To this end, a two-phase approach, one with managers and another with sales persons were deployed in data collection. Also, the same questionnaires with the same wording were administered. This ensured that differences between answers (should there be any), are due to real differences between respondents and not artificial (Krosnick 1999.p: 542). Whiles managers were contacted in their offices to answer the questionnaires; sales persons devoted fifteen minutes of their monthly sales meeting to answer the questionnaires.

4. Findings

The data collected was double-entered using FoxPro 2.6 (DOS) software. The data generated by FoxPro was converted into State 7.0 format (another software), a statistical package used to accomplish most of the common statistical tasks (Hamilton, 2003). This then enabled the presentation of results in the form of tables, graphs and summaries.

4.1. The Hiring Process

4.1.1. Managers

As can be observed in Table 1 below, the managers by a 100% score were unanimous that Company Managers determine when and how to hire and that this is when there is business growth or a vacancy. They all play a role in the hiring process (eight or 100%) as the firms handle the hiring of sales persons in-house, notwithstanding the benefits of timesaving, cost, confidentiality and better returns in subletting the process. Still on managers, sales vacancies are filled from within the firms and from the public. In addition, interested employees with requisite skills are given the opportunity to fill sales vacancies. On how information is spread about the job offer, internal adverts and departmental recommendations are used for internal recruiting, whereas adverts through the medium of newspapers are used for public recruitment.

Variable	Frequency Distribution (%)	
Are you involved in the process?	Yes	8 (100)
	No	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)
Who makes hiring decisions?	Directors	8 (100)
	Others	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)
How often do you hire?	A vacancy	8 (100)
	Growth	8 (100)
How do you fill sales vacancies?	Internal	8 (100)
	Public	8 (100)
	Total	8 (100)
How do you go about the internal recruiting?	Internal Adverts	8 (100)
	Recommendations	8 (100)
	Total	8 (100)
How do you go about the public recruiting?	Adverts	8 (100)
	Others	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)
What medium of advertising is used for the public hiring?	News papers	8 (100)
	Others	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)
Do you sublet the hiring process?	No	8 (100)
	Yes	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)
What are the gains to be derived from subletting the hiring process?	Saves time	8 (100)
	Saves money	8 (100)
	Brings out the best	8 (100)
	Confidential	8 (100)
	Expertise	8 (100)
	Total	8 (100)
Do you do a job analysis?	Yes	8 (100)
	No	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)

Table 1: Managers' view on the hiring process

4.1.2. Sales Persons

Ironically, the sales persons in the sample were all male, and with a mean score of five (5) years work experience (see Table, 2). Also, they took up the sales job principally because of interest and referrals representing fifty-one or 91% and five or 9% respectively. Forty-nine or 88% of sales persons agreed that their main source of information on sales vacancies was through adverts. Significantly, they corroborated with managers that interviews and tests are the main hiring techniques applicable in their firms with a score of fifty-three or 95% and forty-two or 75% respectively. In addition, fifty-three or 94% sales persons interviewed went through the process of hiring.

Variable	Frequency Distribution (%)	
Sex	Male	56 (100)
	Female	0 (0)
	Total	56 (100)
Length of service (years)	1	2 (3.57)
	3	11 (19.64)
	4	10 (17.86)
	5	6 (10.71)
	6	7 (12.50)
	7	7 (12.50)
	8	9 (16.07)
	9	2 (3.57)
	10	1 (1.79)
	11	1 (1.79)
	Total	56 (100)
What made you take up a sales job?	interest	51 (91.07)
	referrals	5 (8.93)
	Total	56 (100)
How did you know about the vacancy?	Adverts	49 (87.50)
	Friends	7 (8.93)
	Total	56 (100)

Table 2: Sales person's demographics and views on the hiring process

Table 3 below presents the views of sales persons on the hiring process. As can be observed in the table, majority of the sales persons (95%) went through the hiring process. Interviews were also the dominant method of recruitment whereas letters of recommendation were the list used method of recruitment.

Variable	Frequency Distribution (%)	
Did you go through the hiring process?	Yes	53 (94.64)
	No	3 (5.36)
	Total	56 (100)
What was the hiring process? Interviews	Yes	53 (94.64)
	No	3 (5.36)
	Total	56 (100)
Test	Yes	42 (75)
	No	14 (25)
	Total	56 (100)
Honesty Test	Yes	2 (3.57)
	No	54 (96.43)
	Total	56 (100)
Letters of recommendation	Yes	1 (1.79)
	No	55 (98.21)
	Total	56 (100)

Table 3: Sales person's demographics and views on the hiring process

4.2. Sales Person's Roles and Qualities as a Guide When Hiring

By a 100% score, managers agreed they consider sales person's roles and qualities during the hiring process (Table, 4). On the specifics, representation and selling duties were each scored by all the eight managers; calling on customers, prospecting, promotional and delivery duties scored 88% each; and sales reporting, management duties scored 63% each. An unexpected discovery was with sales reporting, customer service and promotional duties; managers by a score of 38%, 25% and 13% respectively did not agree those roles to be worth considering.

Variable	Frequency Distribution (%)	
	Yes	No
Do you consider sales person's roles in the process?	Yes	8 (100)
	No	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)
What are these roles? Representation	Yes	8 (100)
	No	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)
Selling	Yes	8 (100)
	No	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)
Calling	Yes	7 (87.5)
	No	1 (12.5)
	Total	8 (100)
Prospecting	Yes	7 (87.5)
	No	1 (12.5)
	Total	8 (100)
Delivery	Yes	5 (62.5)
	No	3 (37.5)
	Total	8 (100)
Training	Yes	5 (62.5)
	No	3 (37.5)
	Total	8 (100)
Promotional	Yes	7 (87.5)
	No	1 (12.5)
	Total	8 (100)
Customer Service	Yes	6 (75)
	No	2 (25)
	Total	8 (100)
Credit	Yes	1 (12.5)
	No	7 (87.5)
	Total	8 (100)
Managing	Yes	5 (62.5)
	No	3 (37.5)
	Total	8 (100)
Learning	Yes	6 (75)
	No	2 (25)
	Total	8 (100)
Sales reports	Yes	5 (62.5)
	No	3 (37.5)
	Total	8 (100)
Do you consider the qualities of the sales person?	Yes	8 (100)
	No	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)

Table 4: Managers' views on roles of sales persons during the hiring process

4.3. Managers' Ratings of Sales Person Roles in the Hiring Process

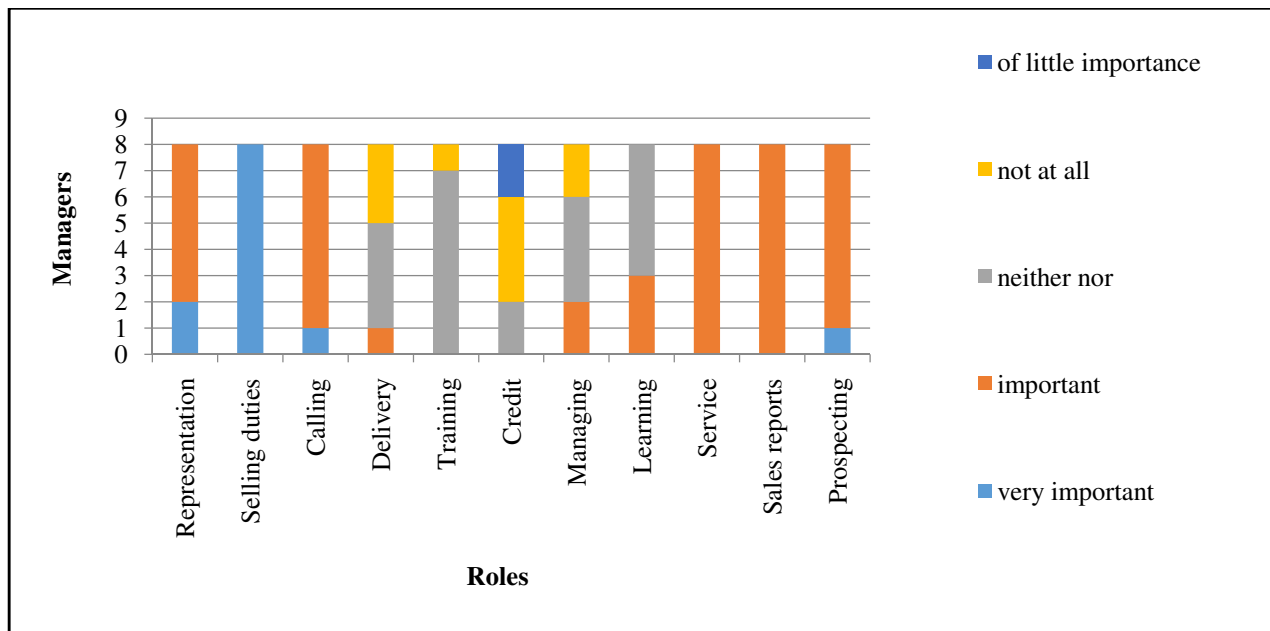


Figure 1: Managers' ratings on sales persons' roles as an influence on recruitment

The results on managers' ratings of sales persons' roles as used in the selection process are shown in Figure 1. As can be observed, eight (8) managers rated selling, two (2) rated representation and one (1) rated prospecting as very important. Also, eight (8) managers rated sales reports and customer service as important and seven (7) managers rated prospecting and calling on customers as important. Surprisingly, three (3) managers rated delivery duties, which is a key function of the sales force as not at all important. This was similar for training, managing and credit, which were rated by one manager, two and four managers respectively as roles that are not at all important during the hiring process.

4.4. Managers' Ratings on Sales Persons' Qualities during the Hiring Process

The results of managers' ratings of sales force qualities as an influence on the recruitment process is shown in figure 2 below. Managers rated sales person's qualities as follows: three (3) managers rated trustworthiness, two (2) each for criticality and communication, and one (1) each for personality, qualification, adaptability and persuasion as very important. Furthermore, eight (8) managers rated sales person's expertise, compatibility, and ability to play in a team, dependability and promptness as important. On the other hand, qualification, persuasion and adaptability were rated by seven (7) managers each as important. It is significant that only one (1) manager did not rate personality as neither nor important, also significant is that none of the qualities was rated by managers as not at all important.

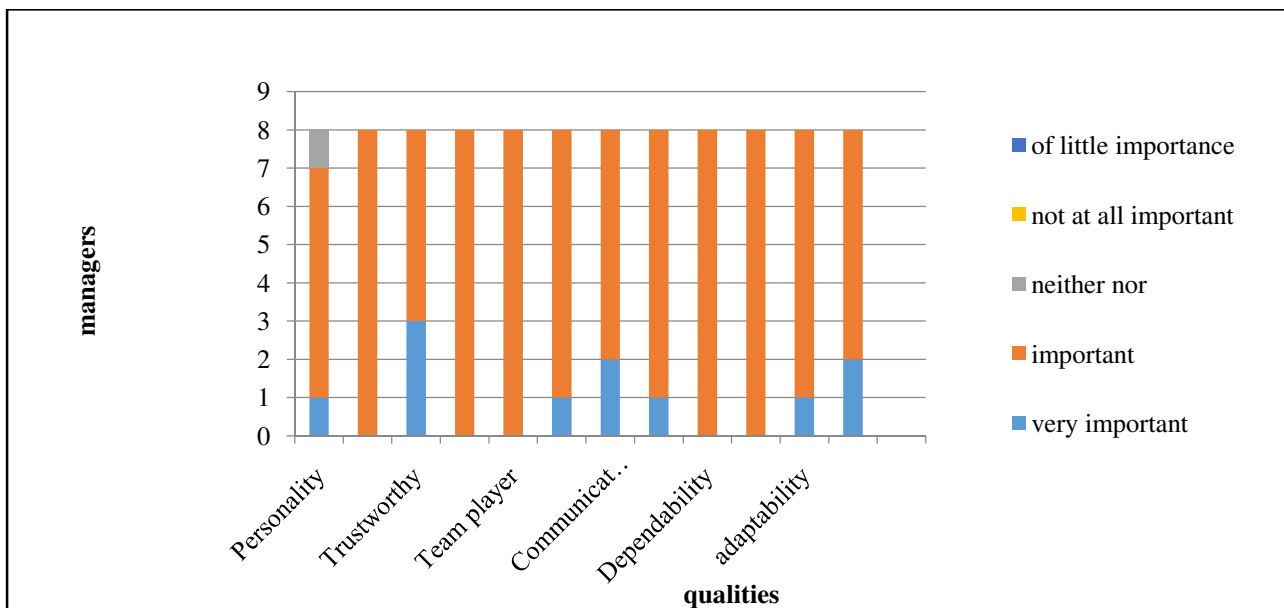


Figure 1: Managers rating on qualities of sales persons as influencing hiring

4.5. Sales Persons Views on Their Role in the Firm

As can be observed in Table 5 below, fifty-three or 95% of sales persons knew their roles before taking up the sale appointment; and among these roles, selling duties and company representation came out prominent with a score of 93% and 91% respectively. The others were credit, learning, management; and surprisingly service duties which scored the lowest with 0%, 4%, 4% and 5% respectively.

4.6. Sales Persons Views on Their Roles Prior to Recruitment

Table 4 below presents sales persons views on their roles prior to recruitment. As can be observed in the table, fifty-three or 95% of sales persons knew their roles before taking up the appointment; and among these roles, selling duties and company representation came out prominent with a score of 93% and 91% respectively. The others were credit, learning, management and surprisingly service duties which scored the lowest with 0%, 4%, 4% and 5% respectively.

Variable	Frequency distribution (%)	
	Did you know the role you will play before taking up the job?	Yes
	No	3 (5)
	Total	56 (100)
Selling	Yes	52 (93)
	No	4 (7)
	Total	56 (100)
Calling	Yes	45 (80)
	No	11 (20)
	Total	56 (100)
Prospecting	Yes	47 (84)
	No	9 (16)
	Total	56 (100)
Delivery	Yes	33 (59)
	No	23 (41)
	Total	56 (100)
Training	Yes	11 (20)
	No	45 (80)
	Total	56 (100)
Merchandising	Yes	35 (63)
	No	21 (37)
	Total	56 (100)
Customer Service	Yes	3 (5)
	No	53 (95)
	Total	56 (100)
Credit	Yes	0 (0)
	No	56 (100)
	Total	56 (100)
Learning duties	Yes	2 (4)
	No	54 (96)
	Total	56 (100)
Management duties	Yes	2 (4)
	No	54 (96)
	Total	56 (100)
Sales reports	Yes	44 (79)
	No	12 (21)
	Total	56 (100)
Representation	Yes	51 (91)
	No	5 (9)
	Total	56 (100)

Table 4: Sales person's views on roles they knew of before taking up the sales job

4.7. Sales Persons' Roles as They Relate to Performance

Figure 3 below present's results on the sales persons' views of their roles as they consider them to be related to performance. As can be observed in the figure, 60% of sales persons scored the selling role, whereas 19% scored for representation. Also, merchandising and prospecting scored 4% each, whereas training and service scored the lowest with 1% each.

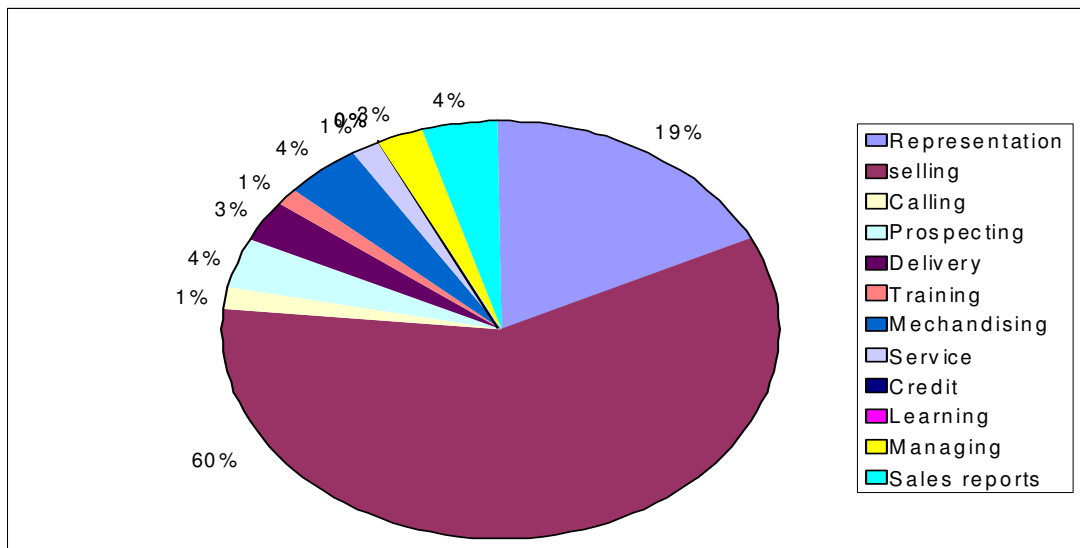


Figure 2: Sales persons' ratings of their roles as they consider to be directly related to performance

4.8. Sales Persons' Views on Qualities

Table 5 below presents results of the views of the sales persons on the qualities that helped them in the recruitment process. As can be observed in the table, in the view of the sales persons on qualities that gave them the job; communication skills, educational attainment and sales experience scored 79%, 66%, and 43% respectively. On the other hand, Sex, Honesty, Age recorded the lowest with 0% 2%, and 9% respectively.

Variable	Frequency distribution (%)	
	Yes	1 (2)
Honesty	No	55 (98)
	Total	56 (100)
	Yes	5 (9)
Age	No	51 (91)
	Total	56 (100)
	Yes	0 (0)
Sex	No	56 (100)
	Total	56 (100)
	Yes	24 (43)
Sales experience	No	32 (57)
	Total	56 (100)
	Yes	22 (39)
Intelligence	No	34 (61)
	Total	56 (100)
	Yes	21 (38)
Aptitude ability	No	35 (62)
	Total	56 (100)
	Yes	44 (79)
Communication	No	22 (21)
	Total	56 (100)
	Yes	11 (20)
Sociability	No	45 (80)
	Total	56 (100)
	Yes	21 (38)
Interpersonal skill	No	35 (62)
	Total	56 (100)
	Yes	37 (66)
Educational attainment	No	19 (34)
	Total	56 (100)

Table 5: The views of sales persons on qualities that gave them the job

4.9. The Hiring Techniques

Table 6 below presents the views of managers on the techniques used in the hiring process. As can be observed in the table, personal interviews, testing, reference checks are the main techniques for the selection of sales persons in the firms, with scores of 100%, 88% and 75% respectively. Letters of recommendation and sales person physical appearance was scored by 50% by managers each. However, honesty test, bio-data, assessment centres, blood type and graphology were not scored by managers, implying they do not apply in the Ghanaian context.

Variable	Frequency Distribution (%)	
	Yes	No
Personal interviews	Yes	8 (100)
	No	0 (0)
	Total	8 (100)
Testing	Yes	7 (87.5)
	No	1 (12.5)
	Total	8 (100)
Honesty test, Bio data, assessment centres, blood type and graphology	Yes	0 (0)
	No	8 (100)
	Total	8 (100)
Letters of recommendation	Yes	4 (50)
	No	4 (50)
	Total	8 (100)
Reference Checks	Yes	6 (75)
	No	2 (25)
	Total	8 (100)
Physical appearance	Yes	4 (50)
	No	4 (50)
	Total	8 (100)
Hiring from the competition	Yes	1 (12.5)
	No	7 (87.5)
	Total	8 (100)

Table 6: Managers views on selection techniques applicable in the firm

4.10. The Effectiveness of the Selection Techniques

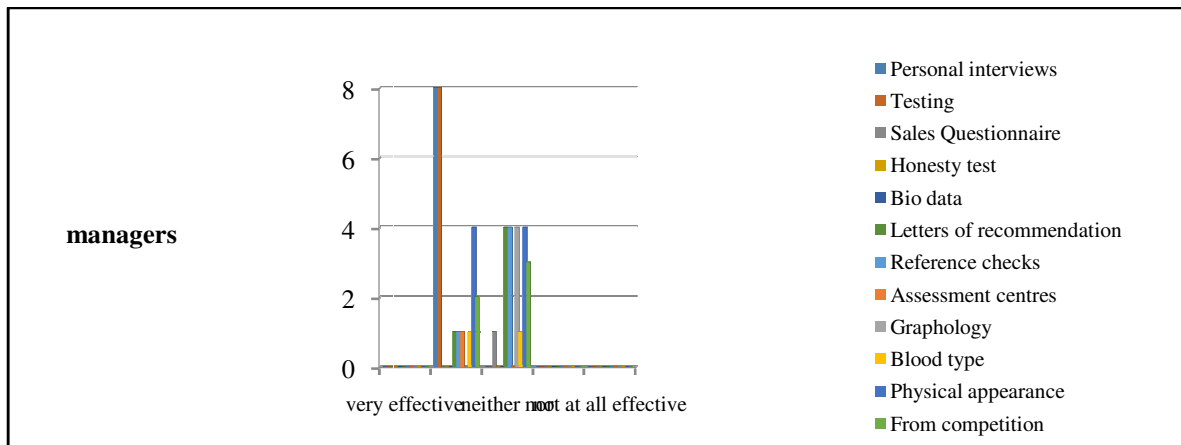


Figure 4: Managers' ratings on the effectiveness of selection techniques.

Figure 4 below presents the views of managers on the effectiveness of the hiring techniques. As can be observed in the figure, it is significant that none of the techniques were rated as very effective by managers. However, personal interviews and testing were rated by eight (8) managers as effective, four (4) managers' rated physical appearance as effective and two (2) managers rated hiring from the competition as effective. On the other hand, four (4) managers rated neither nor for letters of recommendation, reference checks, graphology, physical appearance.

4.11. Summary of Results

It came out from the study that the firms handle the hiring of sales persons in house, despite the recognition of the immense benefits in subletting the process (Table, 1). On the positive side, an opportunity is given to interested persons within the firms with the requisite skills to fill sales vacancies; which can be a morale booster to workers who may want a job rotation. This also has the

potential to increase productivity as opening up the opportunity for internal candidates gives them the incentive to work harder (i.e., Behrenz, 2001). But on job advertisement, the medium of newspapers as the main channel of spreading the job information (see table 1 and 2) has the potential to limit the extent to which information about job offers are spread. This has the potential to deprive the firms of a diversity of potential sales persons to choose from.

On selection techniques, it is significant that managers and sales persons collaborated that interviews and test are the main techniques. Also significant, unlike managers who scored physical appearance and letters of recommendation as recruitment techniques, sales persons did not score them (see Table 2 & 6). This is good for the selection process because manipulation may be minimised if applicants do not know that these two techniques are applied in the interview.

Also significant is that the hiring techniques are not very effective in achieving their purpose (see Figure 4). This may imply that managers do not have the required competencies in hiring and so may have to rely on external resources in the form consultants who have expertise in such matters.

On sales person roles and qualities, the results revealed knowledge gaps from both managers and sales person i.e. some sales persons albeit in minority, did not know that calling on customers; merchandising and surprisingly product delivery have a serious impact on performance (see Figure, 3). Also, some sales persons did not know of customer service as a key role before taking up the job (see Table, 4). This implies that if care is not taken, such sales persons may be ignoring such core duties on the field, and so may not be performing to satisfaction. On managers, it was startling to discover that some of them, although in minority, did not take into consideration; delivery duties, service duties, and sales reporting as critical roles of sales persons during the process (see Table, 3 and Figure, 1). This knowledge gap can have a negative effect on the selection process, and subsequently on sales performance.

5. Recommendations

The problems bedevilling the hiring process has been noted in the findings i.e., the hiring techniques have not been very effective in achieving their purpose; knowledge gaps were also identified with some managers and sales persons on the importance of sales person's roles on the process and productivity. Another weakness was the reliance on mainly newspapers as the main channel of spreading information about the job offer in a media environment as diverse as what pertains in the country. These signal the possibility of managers not having the required competencies in hiring. The option of subletting the process to external sources consultants who have the expertise in such matters may have to be considered. On the positive, the discovery that existing employees with skills are given opportunity to fill sales vacancies should be encouraged; this increases the chances of employees for promotion and job rotation which could influence hard work and performance.

Further, managers should approach hiring as a strategic business function where the sales person's entire life cycle is considered in decisions on hiring. Das (2002, p: 30) argues that with an increasing uncertainty in employment tenure caused by technological and trade challenges the environment will continue to be sophisticated. To this end, it is recommended for the firms to institute a transparent process that will enable the engagement of value for money consulting firms, who have the requisite skills to take up the hiring role. This relieves managers to focus more on other core duties that goes beyond selection and the job offer. This changeover should however be managed professionally so that the consultants understand their job, the firm's culture and any other information that could be useful. One such useful information that should be passed on to the consultants is that the firm gives opportunity to internal applicants who have the requisite skill as a way of boosting morale. On the part of training, it is recommended that programs are designed around sales person's roles to be targeted first to managers who will subsequently train the sales force. A well-packaged training program has the potential to improve performance by adequately preparing managers and sales persons on skills that are critical for sales performance.

5.1. Limitations and Consideration for Further research

The study has limitations so broad generalisations from the findings and the implications suggested should be undertaken with some caution. Specifically, the study was conducted with a sample that raises some validity problems (i.e., the sample was purposively chosen). Furthermore, all respondents in the case of sales persons were male, and with a relatively young work experience. However, while these limitations may confine the generalizability of the findings, they do suggest some areas for further research. Researchers would provide great value to practitioners if the scope could be broadened to include all the players in the industry. In so doing, the concepts to be measured could also be broadened to include more of respondent's demographics. Also, the reasoning behind the various choices of concepts could also be explored.

5.2. Conclusion

Finally, to think that there is a quick solution to the difficult job of selecting or recruiting sales persons is an illusion (Randall & Randall 2000). What may work is for managers to collaborate closely with hiring consultants who have requisite capability in such matters. This collaboration may be in the form of managers sharing with consultants the necessary in-firm information required for success in the hiring process. Once the task of hiring is no more directly the responsibility of managers, the core management duties of training, mentoring, supervision and creating an enabling work environment can be focused on to get sales persons work enthusiastically at achieving results that are satisfactory.

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