UNIT 4 RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF SALES PERSONNEL
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4.0 INTRODUCTION

The process of recruiting and selecting sales people in an organization is an important duty of the sales manager and the Human Resource department of an organization. The selection process starts with recruitment and selection policies made by the organization, after which a job analysis is conducted together with job description. Finally, the applications received are screened through the selection process which is described herewith.

The steps involved in the entire process of recruitment and selection are establishing policy of selection and recruitment, conducting job analysis, writing job description, developing statement of job qualification, finding applicants, using selection procedure and evaluating applicants.

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the importance of recruiting the right kind of salesperson for the job
- Explain the various sources of recruitment within and outside an organization
- Know the different steps involved in the selection of a salesperson
- Appreciate the importance of job analysis, job description and job specification in the selection of a salesperson
4.2 RECRUITMENT

Acquiring the proper number and the right kind of sales personnel required for servicing the organization’s customers and prospects is the key responsibility of the Sales Manager. Having made the first strategic decision on the desired kind of sales personnel, implementation requires job analysis, the writing of job descriptions, and the deriving of job specification so that recruiters will know what qualifications they should look for in prospective sales employees, and sales trainers will know the additional qualifications they should aim at providing the newly-recruited sales personnel with. Having made the second strategic decision on the number of sales personnel, the first thing that needs to be done is to recruit that number.

4.3 ORGANIZATION FOR RECRUITING AND SELECTION

The organization for recruiting and selection of sales personnel varies from company to company. Companies with a small sales force sometimes assign the sole responsibility for recruitment and selection of sales personnel to the company’s personnel manager. This responsibility is the concern of regional or district sales offices but it may vary from one company to another.

4.3.1 Sources within the Organization

Many individuals apply for sales jobs because they know the company’s sales personnel; and sales people’s recommendations may constitute an excellent source. Often such applicants already know something about the job and about company policies, and the fact that they apply indicates a favourable disposition toward the company.

**Company executives**

Recommendations by the sales manager, the president, and other company executives are frequently an important source of recruitment.

**Internal transfers**

Two additional internal sources are other departments and the non-selling section of the sales department.

4.3.2 Sources outside the Company: Direct Unsolicited Application

Most companies receive some unsolicited ‘walk-in’ and ‘write-in’ applications for sales positions.

**Placement agencies**

Sales managers traditionally regard employment agencies as unpromising sources but certain organizations do take the help of these agencies.
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Sales people making calls on the company

The purchasing manager is in contact with sales personnel from other companies and is in a strategic position to evaluate their on-the-job performances. The purchasing manager meets high-calibre sales people for whom jobs with the company would be attractive both financially and in other respects. In well-managed companies the purchasing manager serves as a ‘centre of influence’.

Employees of customers

Some companies regard their customers as a recruiting source. Customers recommend people in their organizations who have reached the maximum potential of their existing jobs. Such transfers may have a favourable effect upon morale in the customer’s organization.

Sales executives’ clubs

Many sales executives’ clubs operate placement services. Salespersons seeking new positions submit personal data sheets that are duplicated and forwarded to members. At club meetings, sales executives have opportunities for informal discussion and exchange of placement information.

Sales forces of non-competing companies

Individuals currently employed as salespersons for non-competing companies are often attractive recruiting prospects.

Sales forces of competing companies

Because of experience gained in selling similar products to similar markets, personnel recruited from competitors’ sales forces may require only minimal initial training.

Educational institutions

This source includes colleges and universities, community colleges, vocational-technical institutes, business colleges. Colleges and universities have become increasingly important points of recruitment of sales and management trainees, and competition for their graduates is keen.

4.4 SELECTION OF THE SALESPERSON

Selection systems are simple one-step systems consisting perhaps of nothing more than an informal personal interview, to a complex multiple-step system incorporating many diverse mechanisms desired to gather information about applicants for sales jobs.

Initial screening before the first formal interview is for the purpose of eliminating obviously unqualified applicants, thus saving the time both of the interviewers and applicants. During pre-interview screening, the applicant is provided information about the company and general details about selling positions in it — a well-prepared recruiting brochure does this effectively and does not require an employee’s time for anything other than to hand it to the applicant. Also, during the pre-interview screening, most organizations ask applicants to complete interview application forms, which are designed to obtain information on the applicant’s basic qualifications, education, experience.
4.4.1 Formal Application Form

The formal application form serves as a central record for all pertinent information collection during the selection process. A formal application is filled after a preliminary interview. The application form may be filled by the applicant personally or by an interviewer who records the applicant’s responses. Sometimes, sections are reserved for later recording of the results of such selection steps as reference and credit checks, testing, and physical examinations. Included are present job, dependents, education, employment status, time with last employer, membership in organizations, previous positions, records of earnings, reason for leaving last job.

4.4.2 The Interview

The interview is the most widely used selection step and in some companies it comprises the entire selection system. Some personnel experts criticize the interview as an unreliable tool, but it is an effective way to obtain certain information. No other method, for instance, is quite so satisfactory in judging an individual’s ability in oral communication, personal appearance and manners, attitude toward selling and life in general, reaction to obstacles presented face-to-face, and personal impact upon others.

4.4.3 Interviewing Technique

Interviews based on a Pattern

Here the interviewer uses a prepared outline of questions designed to elicit basic information from the applicant.

Interviews without an Outline

In this technique the applicant is encouraged to speak freely about his or her experience, training, and future plans. The interviewer asks a few direct questions and says only enough to keep the interviewer talking. Some personal experts say that a non-directive technique yields maximum insight into an individual’s attitude and interests.
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Stress Interview

The stress interview simulates the stresses the applicant would meet in actual selling situations and provides a way to observe the applicant’s reactions to them.

Recently, stress interviewing has become a more complex and sophisticated technique. In this situation, two interviewers are required — one uses psychological techniques to set up the simulated situations while the other observes and records the applicant’s reactions.

Rating Scales: Likert and Semantic Differential Scales

Personal interviews have a tendency to lack objectivity, an error that can be corrected through rating scales. These are so constructed that interviewer’s ratings are channelled into limited choice responses.

The Likert Scale is based on agreement and disagreement of the interviewer while interviewing. Semantic scales are based on two opposite traits, e.g., does the interviewee show interest in sports? The choice that the scale would give is yes, partially yes, no, completely no.

The Likert Scale is a five-point scale and the Semantic Scale can be a five-, seven- or eleven-point scale, as shown in Figures 4.2 and 4.3 respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>completely agree</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>completely disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Figure 4.2 The Likert Measurement Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>yes</th>
<th>partially yes</th>
<th>can’t say</th>
<th>partially no</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Figure 4.3 The Semantic Differential Scale

4.4.4 References

References are used to secure information about the applicant not available from other sources. Personal contact is the best way to obtain information from references, for most people are more frank orally than in writing. When a reference is located at a distance, a telephone call may substitute for personal contact. References fall in the following categories: present or former employers, former customers, reputable citizens, mutual acquaintances.

4.4.5 Different Types of Tests Administered on Recruitment of Sales People

Three types of psychological tests are used in selection systems for sales personnel: tests of ability, of habitual characteristics and of achievement. The diagrammatic representation of these can be seen in Figure 4.4.

Tests of ability

These measure how well a person can perform particular tasks with maximum motivation. Tests of habitual characteristics gauge how a prospective employee performs in his/her
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daily work. Achievement tests measure how much individuals have learned from their experience, training or education.

Tests of ability include tests of mental ability (intelligence tests) and tests of special abilities (aptitude tests). Tests of mental ability, or intelligence tests are used satisfactorily in a wide range of applications.

Certain tests are designed to measure special abilities or aptitudes such as spatial and perceptual abilities, speed and reaction time, mechanical comprehension, and artistic abilities.

There is some evidence that the existence of two basic qualities, empathy and ego drive, are essential in good sales people. Empathy is the ability to feel as others do, to put oneself in another person’s shoes. The empathetic salesperson senses the reactions of customers and adjusts to these reactions, achieving real interaction with customers. The second basic quality—ego drive—makes the salesperson want to make the sale in a personal way, not merely for the money to be gained. The salesperson feels that he has to strike a deal with the customer.

Tests of habitual characteristics

These include attitude, personality, and interest tests. Attitude tests are more appropriate as morale-measuring techniques than as selection aids. They are used to ascertain employees’ feelings toward working conditions, pay, advancement opportunities, and the like.

Test of ability
- mental abilities
- aptitude test

Test of habitual characteristics
- attitude
- personality
- interest

Test of achievement

Figure 4.4 Different Types of Selection Tests

Projective tests

Projective tests, of which the Rorschach test is the best known, are a promising technique for personality measurement. They are mind-probing tests. However, they must be administered by skilled testers, and their results represent a subjective option rather than an objective measure. Further, refinements of projective techniques may eventually provide useful personality measurements.

Interest tests

A basic assumption implicit in the use of interest tests is that a relationship exists between interest and motivation. Hence, if two persons have equal ability, the one with the greater interest in a particular job should be more successful in that job. A second implicit assumption is that interests are constant, that those of a person at age forty are the same as they were at twenty-one.
Achievement tests

Achievement tests seek to determine how much individuals know about a particular subject.

Physical examination

Since good health is important for anybody’s success, most companies require physical examinations of all applicants being seriously considered for sales positions. Because of their relatively high cost, the physical examination is generally one of the last steps in the selection system.

Job analysis and selection

Research relating sales people’s personal characteristics to sales aptitude and job performance suggests there is no single set of traits and abilities that sales managers can use as criteria in deciding what kind of recruits to hire. Different sales jobs require the performance of different activities, and this suggests that people with different personality traits and abilities should be hired to fill them. The first activity in the recruitment and selection process is conducting a job analysis to determine what activities, tasks, responsibilities, and environmental influences affect a salesperson’s life.

The second is to develop a statement of job qualification that determines and describes the responsibilities involved in the job.

4.5 JOB DESCRIPTION

Most organizations have written job descriptions for sales force positions.

In some organizations, analysing and describing sales responsibilities are assigned to somebody in sales management. In other firms, the task is assigned to a job analysis specialist, who is either someone from the organization or an outside person. Regardless of who is responsible for analysing and describing the various selling positions within an organization, it is important that the person collects information about the job’s content from two sources: (i) the current occupants of the job and (ii) the sales managers who supervise the people in the job.

A good description of a sales job would have the following elements:

• The nature of products(s) or services(s) to be sold.
• The types of customers to be called on, including the policies of the organization.
• The specific tasks and responsibilities to be carried out, including planning tasks, research and information collection activities, specific selling tasks, other promotional activities.
• The relationships between the salesperson and other positions within the organization.
• The line of reporting.
• The salesperson’s responsibilities to his/her immediate superior.
• The mental and physical demands of the job, including the level of technical knowledge the salesperson should have concerning the organization’s products.
• Other necessary skills.
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• The environmental pressures and constraints that might influence performance on the job, such as market trends, and the company’s reputation among customers.

The job description acts as a blueprint for job specification. This outlines the type of applicant the organization is seeking—his qualifications and experience. The sequence of job analysis to specification can be seen in Figure 4.5.

| Job analysis | Job description | Job specification |

Figure 4.5 Job Analysis, Description and Specification

4.6 SUMMARY

Recruitment and selection of sales people is a very important activity in any sales organization. This function has to be performed very carefully keeping in view the needs of the organization, type of sales work, and responsibilities that the salesperson has to undertake.

Proper selection and recruitment policies take place when an organization lays down the process of job analysis, description and specification in the right manner. Inducting the right kind of salespersons who can perform their duties efficiently is the basic need of any sales organization.

4.7 KEY TERMS

• Recruitment: It is the process of inducting new people into an organization.

• Selection: It is the process of selecting sales people, which begins from a preliminary interview and ends with the final offer given to the salesperson.

• Job analysis: It refers to a salesperson’s personal characteristics, his environmental influences and other personal influences that affect his job performance.

• Job description: It refers to the nature of the job and responsibilities that a salesperson has to undertake.

• Psychological tests: These are tests which measure the intelligence, experience and aptitude of a salesperson in performing his duties efficiently.

4.8 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’

1. Acquiring the proper number and the right kind of sales personnel required for servicing the organization’s customers and prospects is the key responsibility of the Sales Manager.

2. During pre-interview screening, the applicant is provided information about the company and general details about selling positions in it — a well-prepared recruiting brochure does this effectively and does not require an employee’s time for anything other than to hand it to the applicant.
3. The stress interview simulates the stresses the applicant would meet in actual selling situations and provides a way to observe the applicant’s reactions to them.

4. The job description acts as a blueprint for job specification. This outlines the type of applicant the organization is seeking—his qualifications and experience.

### 4.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

**Short-Answer Questions**

1. List the various external sources of recruitment.
2. What do you understand by stress interview?
3. Identify the features of the Likert rating scale.
4. What are the features of job description?

**Long-Answer Questions**

1. Why is it important to recruit the right kind of people? What is the criteria for recruiting the right manpower?
2. Reference checks are an important criterion in selection — why? Give examples.
3. What is the benefit of psychological tests? Why and where are they used?
4. Why are rating scales used in the evaluation of manpower recruitment?