




CAN YOU PREDICT A SALES TEAM EFFECTIVENESS? A CASE STUDY.

Everyone knows how important an effective sales department is for a company's development - it is one of the key elements of a huge mechanism which moves a company forward, and that department's strength depends not only on how many people propel that mechanism, but also, probably most importantly, how effective these employees are. And while some parts of this mechanism work smoothly and fit it perfectly, others might sometimes need a review. It is noteworthy that how effective a specific part of the mechanism is, and whether it will fit the mechanism in the long run at all, can be predicted with a high probability. And although it is worth to evaluate the competences of employees in all departments, it seems that sales is often number one on our review list. This is confirmed for instance by a research project conducted by EFFECTIVENESS and the SW Research agency¹ - 56% of respondents indicate that employee competency evaluation is particularly important in the sales department.

What follows is an example of a sales team in an international IT company operating on the Polish market. The sales managers in question have similar working experience, they have been working in the same line-up for two years and were joined by their current boss half a year ago. The aim of the project was to diagnose if there is something which all employees who achieve the best results have in common, in other words: what soft skills determine their effectiveness and what support the team needs to improve their sales performance this year. The boss admitted that he is impressed by the team's enthusiasm, strong expertise and independence. When asked about whether he found anything to be alarming, he said that two employees of the ten-people team fail to rise above the minimum expected level, despite of the fact that he sees their huge commitment on a daily basis and that it is sometimes difficult to communicate with one of those two employees.

¹ Data from a survey conducted by the SW Research agency among 250 representatives of companies employing at least 10 people. Respondents were people who regularly, actively participate in recruitment processes (HR specialists, personnel department employees, board members) organized by employers. The survey was conducted between 19.04.2014 and 19.06.2014 by using individual computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI) on proprietary 3S software.

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The D3™ soft skill evaluation assessment (DISC/TEAMS/VALUES) was used in the project to assess the attitude at the workplace, diagnose the natural sales style at the level of communication, decision-making, closing the sale, establishing relations, team roles – the obligations they feel most comfortable with and at which they are most effective at, the values they go by when taking decisions and – which is of key importance to sales teams – internal motivators – what needs at work must be secured for an employee to feel fulfilled and engaged. An analysis of the assessment results for both the boss and the entire team immediately showed what they all had in common. The entire sales team has highly developed skills in terms of strategy-building, which is connected with a good knowledge of the market, listening to the customer while being focused on finding a solution, the ease with which they are able to select solutions corresponding best to the customer's actual needs. Furthermore, each of the project participants wanted to enhance their current knowledge and find new solutions; they wanted to excel in their area of expertise. This confirmed the leader's observations about the team's strong expert knowledge.

Employees who were indicated as the most effective had very different sales styles. The advantage of some of them is an open, bold communication style – they deal with customers' objections quickly and they do not withdraw before they achieve what they intended to achieve; they are motivated by challenges, personal growth and competition (INFLUENCING and DOMINANT sales style). Other employees consider sales as an OPPORTUNITY to help others; they deliver a product, a solution which is supposed to serve as the "cure" for a specific problem faced by the client (STEADY sales style). Very good sales results were also obtained by those employees who feel most at ease when communicating through facts, figures, hard arguments – they help customers see the rational benefit of the offered product or service (COMPLIANT sales style).

Sales, and being effective at sales, can be done in various different ways. The reasons for the lower effectiveness of the two team members were related to their internal motivation (imagine an iceberg: we are referring to the part which is hidden under the water surface, which cannot be seen on an every-day basis or, for instance, during a job interview). The persons in question had the lowest ECONOMY ratio, which means that, as mentioned before, they did want to become better experts and learn new solutions, however they do not always think about how that can be translated into better financial

performance – how one can sell more and earn more. It is interesting that (unlike other team members), one of those two employees found it very important for his need to EXERT INFLUENCE to be satisfied. This was manifested in the fact that he found it very demotivating to meet the reporting obligation in the way adopted in the company, to act in accordance with the line of thought and sales style which results from the applicable standards and strategies. This person admitted that he wants to create his own line of thought and does not want to be the kind of person who simply follows the strategy adopted by the department. This was exactly the source of conflict between the sales manager and his supervisor. He felt that this was not the place for him, however until that moment, he had not realized the origin of those frustrations. The employee in question decided to change his job (retaining an employee at all cost is not always a good thing, sic!).

In order to enhance the sales department's potential, feedback sessions were conducted with each employee; the sessions discussed results of the competency assessments with particular focus on the strengths in sales, the method of building and maintaining customer relations, and how such a sales style can be perceived by customers. Effective sellers are aware of their own strengths and limitations and quickly recognize strengths, limitations, needs and preferences of their customers. And therefore the next step in the development of competences was the training course; its goal was to make the employees aware of their own sales style and to equip them with the skill to quickly recognize customers' purchasing style and to teach them to respond effectively in various kinds of situations, in particular "difficult" situations resulting from failure to understand changes introduced into the offer, the customer's objections, indecision etc.

Each of the employees of the sales department received tasks in the field of personal development, which were diagnosed in the competency test and which he or she undertook to achieve by the end of 2016. Repeating the same test after one year, comparing its results and sales performance will make it possible to assess the level of competency development. Additionally, the same kind of test is applied in the company in the case of new recruitment processes for the sales department and is used to evaluate compliance of the candidate's profile with the profile of the most effective employees on the team.