UNIT 5 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF SALES PERSONNEL
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5.0 INTRODUCTION
Training of salespersons in any organization is an important and ongoing activity. Training makes salespersons more skilled so that they can perform better in an ever-changing environment.

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

- Understand the importance of sales training in an organization
- Analyse the training needs of salespersons
- Describe the various types of training programmes in an organization
- Emphasize training as an essential tool for the development of sales people
- Build a sales training programme according to the needs of salespersons
5.2 BUILDING A SALES TRAINING PROGRAMME

Building a sales training programme requires five major decisions — aim, content, method, execution and evaluation. These are referred to as the A-C-M-E-E decisions, as shown in Figure 5.1.

![Figure 5.1: The ACMEE Approach](image)

The aim of training is to identify the experience and needs of salespersons for training. The content consists of product data, sales technique, markets, etc.

The method of training varies according to the situation and needs of an organization. Execution of training includes how and where the training will take place. Evaluation of training finally judges the effect of a training programme on the organization and salesperson.

Training varies with the salesperson’s career cycle, which is depicted in Figure 5.2. Salespersons have varied backgrounds, experience levels, learning abilities, etc., and therefore have their own particular training needs.

![Figure 5.2: A Salesperson's Career Cycle](image)

5.2.1 Identifying Initial Training Needs

The initial training needs of a sales training programme can be identified by the analysis of three main factors, as discussed below.

(i) Job Specification

The qualifications needed to perform a job are detailed in job specification. The set of job specifications needs scrutinizing for clues as to the areas in which new personnel are most likely to need training.
(ii) Trainee’s Background and Experience

The gap between the qualifications in the job specifications and those a trainee already has represents the nature and amount of training needed.

(iii) Sales-related Marketing Policies

The analysis of sales-related marketing policies is also necessary to determine initial sales training needs because the differences in products, markets and their selling practices and policies determine the differences in training programmes.

For example, selling of highly technical goods involves training with lot of product information while selling of non-technical goods involves only initial sales training programmes.

Identifying Continuing Sales Training Programmes

The identification of continuing sales training needs means to identify those training needs of experienced sales personnel which are considered necessary due to changes in market, product, marketing policies, procedures, the organization and even in the sales personnel themselves.

5.3 CONTENT OF TRAINING

The content of training is not the same for all sales training programmes. It varies from company to company because of differences in products, markets, company policies, trainees’ ability and experience, and organizational size. In every initial sales training programme, companies mainly focus on product data, sales techniques, markets and company information.

Product training depends on the nature of the product – if the product is highly technical, more than half the programme would be devoted to product training; if the product is non-technical, then minimal amount of product training is required.

The predominant view is that new sales personnel need basic instructions in how to sell.

The salesperson needs to know who the customers are, their particular locations and the particular products in which they are interested. Besides, the salesperson should also know about their buying habits, motives and financial condition. But the training in this context should not be stagnant; it should be continuous because markets are always changing.

The company should essentially inform the salesperson about the company’s pricing policy, product services, spare parts and repairs, credit extension and customer relations.

5.4 METHODS OF TRAINING

The selection of appropriate training methods for a training programme depends on the content of the training. Some of the important and appropriate methods of sales training are lectures, conferences, demonstrations, role playing, case-discussions, impromptu discussions, gaming, on-the-job training, programmed learning and correspondence courses.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the aim of training?
2. What are the features of the content of training?
5.4.1 Lecture

Lecturing is a method of learning through instructions from the trainer(s) to the trainee(s). Trainees observe and listen and ask questions at the end of the session.

The trainer can personally interact with and solve any problems faced by the trainee. It is also an economical method of training sales people. The trainer is easily approachable by the salespersons, and frank discussions result in the generation of new ideas and solving of problems faced by the trainees.

5.4.2 Role Playing

In the role playing method, the trainer first describes a situation and the different personalities involved. The trainee is then asked to play the role of those characters in different situations.

Role playing can be defined as a method of human interaction which involves realistic behaviour in an imaginary situation.

Role plays keeps the interest alive as the trainee performs the role assigned to him and in the process learns how to act in real-life situations and gains experience in handling them effectively. It also provides the opportunity for introspection into the behaviour and mind of the trainee.

5.4.3 Case Method

The case is a set of data (real or fictional, written). Miniature descriptions and summary of such data presents the issues and problems calling for solutions or actions on the part of the trainee.

When the trainees are given cases to analyse, they are asked to identify the problem and to recommend tentative solutions through group discussions. Real-life cases give first-hand information to the trainee about sales situations. He can analyse the case and give a solution in the case study. This gives them first-hand experience of the types of problems that exist in the marketplace and how these problems can/should be tackled.

5.4.4 Gaming Simulation

This method is somewhat similar to role playing, with the unique feature that it uses highly structured situations based on reality and players receive information feedback.

5.4.5 On-the-Job Training

When a salesperson joins any organization, he is given training in the product and its technical features, competition, and its customers in the marketplace and within the organization.

In this the salesmen are coached and instructed by skilled co-workers or by supervisors or by the special training instructor. Sometimes the first sales call made by the salesperson is made under the supervision of the trainer so that any mistakes made by the salesperson can be rectified.

5.4.6 Programmed Learning/Electronic Training

Interactive video is used often to train people where a personal computer and a laser videodisc provide an interactive TV.

Programmed instruction involves a sequence of steps that are often set up through the central panel of an electronic computer as a guide in the performance of a desired
operation or service of operation. A trainee can practise calls with an on-screen actor whose response is a function of the trainee’s approach.

5.4.7 Correspondence Courses

Companies with highly technical products and small but widely deployed sales forces use correspondence courses to acquaint experienced sales people with new product development and applications. These courses provide written material given to the trainees who can read and understand the same.

If the initial sales training is a line function then training is assigned to top sales executives but if it is a staff function then the responsibility of initial sales training is given to the personnel department.

The responsibility for continuing sales training resides with the top sales executive.

Sometimes outside experts are also hired to conduct portions of sales training programmes relating to sales techniques.

5.4.8 Sales Training Programmes

Timing for initial sales training programmes depends upon the number of new personnel trained each year, which in turn depends upon the size of the sales force, sales personnel, turnover and management plans for changing the size of the sales force.

The principle of an effective sales training programme is that learning must be continuous – new information must be assimilated and other concepts modified in the light of new developments. This requires that each salesperson’s training should continue as long as he is on the job.

Training to sales force helps in:

- Dealing with new selling techniques
- New product applications
- New customer problems
- New selling aids.

Training programmes are held either at centralized or decentralized points. The centralized programme generally provides better product training but higher costs are incurred in bringing trainees to the central point. But decentralized training has even more serious defects. It cannot be executed properly unless supervised by the top management.

5.5 EVALUATION OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Evaluation of a training programmes involves the comparing of the training programme’s aim with the results and measuring its impact on the salesperson.

There is no direct method of measuring the impact of training but certain methods are available for ascertaining whether the results are positive or not.

These are:

- Market share percentages: these are judged by the increase or decrease in the market share of the product.
- Written tests: taking a test of the sales people who were trained.
- Observers who work with sales personnel: the performance of sales people is judged by the trainer, who observes the actual selling situations.
5.6 OBJECTIVES OF SALES TRAINING

Although the specific objectives of sales training may vary from firm to firm, there is some agreement on the broad objectives. Sales training is undertaken to increase productivity, motivate, improve turnover, improve customer relations, and produce better management of time and territory.

5.6.1 CREATING CREDIBILITY IN SALES TRAINING

Many sales trainers believe their programmes lack credibility. Cost-cutting efforts are too often directed at existing sales training programmes. Sales training programmes have to be sold, just like any other product or service. Well-designed programmes are easier to sell to management than those put together with little thought.

5.6.2 ANALYSING NEEDS

The starting point in creating credibility is to analyse the needs of the sales force. One way to do this is to travel with sales representatives, observing them and asking what they need to know that will help them perform more effectively. The analysis of the needs for sales training is depicted in Figure 5.3.
5.6.3 Determining Objectives

Setting specific, realistic and measurable objectives adds to the credibility of a sales training programme. The objectives may include learning about new products, new techniques, or new procedures. It pays to keep the objectives simple. Management may want a 10 per cent sales increase, which then becomes the broad objective of the training programme. The specific objective might be to teach sales representatives how to call on new accounts, which will help lead to the broad objective.

5.6.4 Developing and Implementing Programmes

Many companies, both large and small, use outside agencies for conducting sales training programmes. Small companies may farm out most of their training needs. Large companies usually develop most of their own programmes and use outside agencies to handle only their specialized needs.

5.7 SUMMARY

Sales training is a varied and ongoing activity that is time consuming and expensive. Most companies engage in some type of sales training. In fact, most sales managers feel that sales training is an important activity that is required for everybody, regardless of their experience. Some common objectives of sales training are: to teach selling skills, increase productivity, improve morale, lower turnover, improve customer relations and improve time and territory management.

Sales training provides managers with the opportunity to convey their expectations to the sales force. A well-designed training programme shows the sales force how to sell. Sales managers can communicate high performance expectations through training and equip the force with the skills needed to reach high performance levels.

5.8 KEY TERMS

- **Product training**: It is the training the salesperson about the product of the organization.
- **Role play**: It is the method of training where the salesperson has to perform the given role.
- **Gaming simulation**: It is performing real-life role play.
- **Electronic training**: It is the training provided to the salesperson through interactive media.
- **Career cycle**: It is the life cycle of the salesperson, beginning from his induction in the organization to retiring from it; the training needs are accordingly identified.
- **On-the-job training**: It is the training given to employees while they are working in the organization.

5.9 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’

1. The aim of training is to identify the experience and needs of salespersons for training. The content consists of product data, sales technique, markets, etc.
2. The content of training is not the same for all sales training programmes. It varies from company to company because of differences in products, markets, company policies, trainees’ ability and experience, and organizational size.

3. In the role playing method, the trainer first describes a situation and the different personalities involved. The trainee is then asked to play the role of those characters in different situations.

4. Training to sales force helps in:
   - Dealing with new selling techniques
   - New product applications
   - New customer problems
   - New selling aids.

5. Evaluation of a training programme involves the comparing of the training programme’s aim with the results and measuring its impact on the salesperson.

5.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What is the importance of sales training in an organization?
2. What are the various types of training programmes in an organization?
3. What is the need for training the sales people in an organization?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse the training needs of a salesperson.
2. Why is it essential to build a sales training programme according to the needs of the salesperson?