Managing Sales Force Turnover – A review on models and challenges encountered by FMCG Companies in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: This study is to provide an understanding to the HR and Sales Management of the medium and large scale FMCG companies in Sri Lanka to identify some of the researched models and how those models have been implemented by the industry to mitigate the high Sales Force turnover which is hampering their business.

The post war era in Sri Lanka created a huge opportunity for FMCG companies in the country to expand their distribution network to the entire Island including those areas where they did not have a proper access. With that the demand for the Sales Representatives increased significantly but the supply was lagging due to many reasons. As a result, the available sales people are at a high demand.

The methodology was based on literature and discussions carried out with industry experts in selected cross sections of FMCG companies of Sri Lanka. Also interviews were held with a sample of senior Sales Representatives in the FMCG industry but not necessarily in the same companies where we interviewed industry experts. All above was based on convenience sampling.

Developing new models on Organizational Culture, Sales Force Remuneration, Sales Force engagement and Organizational Commitment have been identified as probable solutions implemented by the FMCG industry in Sri Lanka towards mitigating the Sales Force Turnover but there is a wide scope for many more work to be done in this area. Also these findings can provide ideas for the education sector to develop certain tools to develop programs to career minded sales personnel. At the same time, the Government Policymakers can use these results to develop the required human resource through the youth development programs.

Key words – Sri Lanka, FMCG, Sales Force Turnover

Background

The survival of any business organization depends on its profits. Therefore the organization has to generate revenue by selling its products or services to the target customers. The task of the revenue generation is the primary responsibility of the Sales Force of any organization. They are the only people within the organization who are assigned to bring money while all other members of the organization are waiting to spend that money brought in by the sales force. So what will happen to the organization if suddenly they lose half of them within a short period of time? Of course, the revenue will not come down by half depending on the consumer loyalty and the demand of the brands marketed by the company. But surely it will never be the same as before. When a sales person leaves, the sales territory is not serviced properly and the organization lose on customer service until a replacement is found(Boles, J.S., Dudley, G.S., Onyemah, V., Rouzie`s, D. and Weeks, W.A., 2012). If the company is dealing with a limited number of high volume customers, this problem can be controlled to a certain extend and the sales management can get involved to hold on for a limited time. But if the customer base is high and scattered around a wide geographical area, it is not an easy task to defend the organization's business.Especially in the FMCG industry where the barriers on brand switching are low, the companies can gain or lose on the customer relationship. It is a fact that the organizations are using the sales team to manage the customer relationship (Bradford, Kevin, Steven Brown, ShankerGanesan, Gary Hunter, Vincent Onyemah, Robert Palmatier., 2010).

Therefore the sales force turnover is a problem and many studies have been done in the past to identify contributory factors for this issue by researches such as Farris, (1971); Muchinsky and Tittle, (1979); Lucas, George H., Jr., A. Parasuraman, Robert A. Davis and Ben M. Enis, (1987); Johnston, Mark W., Charles M. Futrell, A. Parasuraman, and Jeffrey Sager, (1988) etc. and they have looked at many variables to predict sales force turnover. Sales function has been identified in the recent past as one of the top 10 jobs in the market that is difficult to fill (Fournier, Christophe, John F. Tanner, Jr., Lawrence B. Chonco, and Chris Manolis, 2010; Rivera, 2007). The replacement cost of a sales person can sometimes go up to 200% of the annual salary (Griffeth and Horn 2001). This could be a major cost to the organization since the turnover in the sales profession has been identified as double when compared to the other functions in the Company (Richardson 1999).

We cannot take the Sales Force turnover in isolation since it is a part of the Employee Turnover of an organization. Therefore, the studies and researches done on the voluntarily turnover of the employees and the respective models have to be studied in the journey to find factors related to Sales Force Turnover. In the subject of traditional attitude turnover model it is revealed that the process of employees' volunteer turnover is mainly consisting of four sectors. It commences with the cause by job dissatisfaction; then, employees' search for substitutable jobs before turnover; is evaluation on such substitutable jobs; and end result is occurrence of turnover behavior (Lee and Mitchell, 1999). According to the study done by ZhengWeibo, SharanKaur and Tao ZhiZheng (2010) on employee turnover models and development in perspective performance, they explain

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that Hausknecht (2008) has listed the major 12 retention factors that have been published in the literature over the last 60 years from 24,829 employees which help explain why employees stay or quit. A brief summary of these content models isexplained in the Table 1.

Table 1.Description and definition of retention factors.

Retention factor	Definition
1. Job satisfaction	*The degree to which individuals like their jobs*
2. Extrinsic rewards	*The amount of pay, benefits, or equivalents distributed in return for service*
3. Constitution attachments	*The degree of attachment to individuals associated with the organization such as supervisor, coworkers, or customers*
4. Organizational commitment	*The degree to which individual's identify with and are involved in the organization*
5. Organizational prestige	*The degree to which the organization is perceived to be reputable and well-regarded*
6. Lack of alternatives	*Beliefs about the unavailability of jobs outside of the organization*
7. Investments	*Perceptions about the length of service to the organization*
8. Advancement opportunities	*The amount of potential for movement to higher levels within the organization*
9. Location	*The proximity of the workplace relative to one's home*
10. Organizational justice	*Perceptions about the fairness of reward allocations, policies and procedures, and interpersonal treatment*
11. Flexible work arrangement	*The nature of the work schedule or hours*
12. Non-work influences	*The existence of responsibilities and commitments outside of the organization*

Most of above factors are included in the models explained by the researchers on Sales Force turnover but their focus has been to find more specific elements directly related to the job functions of the sales force and the related factors in the environment in which Sales personnel perform their duties.

Sales force and the FMCG Industry in Sri Lanka

To do a deep dive into the industry and understand the related issues on the subject, a series of interviews were conducted with industry experts who have a strong sales background and now holding General Manager, CEO or Director Positions in the FMCG Industry in Sri Lanka. Simultaneously, a group of Sales Representatives working in few of the different sectors in the FMCG industry (Confectionery, Food, Personal Care, Carbonated Beverages and Stationery) were interviewed to validate the actions taken by the companies in order to arrest the attrition. The information gathered was cross checked with both above groups before including into this report.

When we analyze the situation of the medium and large scale FMCG Companies operated in Sri Lanka, their sales operation is mainly divided into 3 channels i.e. Grocery, Modern Trade and HORECA (Hotels, Restaurants and Catering outlets). The average contribution from the Modern Trade is around 15% (Nielsen 2016) and it is on an upward trend. Sri Lanka is not a country with a high market concentration. However this percentage can be higher for certain companies, if the products marketed by the organization are targeted to the top end of the market. The business from the HORECA channel is also dependent on the products marketed by the organization. If the FMCG Company is involved in food and beverage business, their sales from this channel can go up to 10% – 15% of the total turnover. However, still the biggest channel for the FMCG industry in Sri Lanka is the Grocery Trade Chanel with a contribution of around 75%.

Once the products are listed, the Supermarkets (Modern Trade channel) will replenish them with a minimum involvement of the sales personnel once their stock levels hit the re-order levels. A similar situation is applied to HORECA channel as well. Once the Purchasing Officer and the Chef are convinced for the quality and cost of the products, they will place orders when stocks reach reorder level. In both above channels, the Push theory cannot work. They will place orders only for their requirement.

However, in the Grocery Channel, the Company has to cater to about 150,000 grocery outlets from the total outlet universe of around 250,000 (Nielsen) operated across the country to reach the total population to whom their products are targeted. The bench mark of 150,000 outlets was taken considering the availability of the products marketed by Unilever Sri Lanka, Ceylon Biscuits and Hemaswho occupy within the Top 5 best distribution companies based on the availability of their products (Nielsen). Except a few mega operators, many FMCG companies do not visit all those outlets. They mainly concentrate of urban and semi urban customers and use the wholesalers to cater the small outlets situated in interior and peripheral locations. However even for that purpose, all national level FMCG companies have to deploy large sales forces that would be based in the respective locations and assigned to work for one or more of the nominated distributors of the company. Most of the companies assign about 600 outlets within a well-defined geographical area for the respective Sales Representative and he will be responsible on behalf of the Organization to service those outlets with a general frequency of once in two weeks. Sales Representative has to cover about 50 outlets per day and within two weeks he can cover 600 outlets by working 12 days excluding Sundays. Although many high level companies are now operating with sales force automation modules with palmtops, still the Sales Representative is the primary contact point with the customer on behalf of the organization. Therefore his rapport and the relationship with the customer, have an effect on the dealings between the two parties. If the relationship is healthy and longer, the effect will be positive to the organization. Since approximately 75% of the FMCG business is derived from this channel, this has become the battling ground for stiff competition. Availability, visibility and the accessibility of the products are extremely important in the FMCG industry and therefore the support of the customer (retailer) has to be earned. And that depends a lot on the Sales Representative who services the retailer. In addition to that, the FMCG industry in the Grocery Channel operates primarily on credit sales.Therefore, the Sales Representative’s involvement and understanding the credit worthiness of the customers play a vital role in sustainability of the FMCG operation.

The immediate effect of the Sales Force turnover of the front liners affects the Regional sales management since it has a direct negative impact on his performances (Johari, Johanim., Tan Fee Yean., Zurina Adnan, KhulidaKiranaYahya and Mohamed Nassruddin Ahmed,2012;Lee and Mitchell, 1999). Therefore at certain times it has been noticed that the sales personnel in the supervisor category in the FMCG industry in Sri Lanka try to cover up for the loss by canvassing orders until a replacement is found. This can create problems across the region since the

Supervisor is compelled to postpone his other important job functions while confined to one sales territory.

A first-line sales management position is relatively more complex than other first-line supervisory positions. Sales managers often must motivate people at long distances; supervise personnel they see on an irregular basis, assume account responsibilities while directing sales subordinates, and conduct situation-specific performance appraisals. Moreover, there are fundamental differences between sales and sales management positions. For example, salespeople typically develop accounts, have an individual perspective, are subordinates, and have a relatively narrow range of specialized responsibilities. Conversely, sales managers generally focus on developing people, have a management-team perspective, are superiors, and have a diverse range of activities. (Dubinsky A.J., Jolson M.A., Micheal R.E., Kotabe M., and Lim C.U., 1992).

The problem

During the decade of 1980, mast of the FMCG companies experienced an exponential growth in their businesses with the rapid economic developments and the opening of the free economy. To facilitate the sudden expansion, some large scale FMCG companies embarked on a new concept called ‘Distributor Sales Representative’ model (DSR model) where the Distributor had to employ a Sales Representative on behalf of the company and the company supported with special allowances to manage the cost. These Distributor Reps were deployed to do the same job functions of the Company Sales Reps but they belonged to the Distributor. Main objective of the Companies was to find a Sales Representative at a lower cost who would not be a permanent employee of the company. Also by finding a person from the same area recommended by the Distributor, the Company managed to assign some additional responsibilities to the Sales Representative that were not performed by the Company Sales Representatives such as collecting cash, driving the truck, working on Saturdays etc.

This was only a solution on one aspect since the working closer to home has a negative relationship with the employee turnover (Hausknecht2008). However, as a result of that, towards the following decades of 1990 and 2000, the quality of the majority Sales Representatives who entered into the profession was not of the same as in the past based on their education levels, social and family backgrounds etc. Therefore, today it has reached to a situation where the Sales Representative profession is not perceived as an area to enter in order to build up a career. It is despite this being an arena where a young energetic school lever could earn an above average income with very rapid career development opportunities. At the same time, this profession has still not been able to attract Sri Lankan females except in few areas where females are involved in personal selling of high end cosmetic products. During the survey conducted, we found there was a zero female Sales Representative in the Grocery Sales Force in the top 5 best distribution FMCG companies in Sri Lanka namely Unilever, GSK, Hemas, CBL and Nestle (Nielsen 2016).

In addition to the above, the demand for the Sales Representatives has increased rapidly with the expansion of distribution across the island after the end of the war in 2009. To meet the initial demand, many companies have deployed the Tamil speaking sales people to the newly opened up areas. But the market has not been able to supply the vacuum created with this new opening. When compared to other professionals, there was no institute to produce the required sales professionals while CIMA, AAT and CA were producing Finance people, CIM, SLIM and many other courses were creating Marketing professionals. Even the Universities did not produce graduates specialized in sales management. At the same time, there was a sudden boom in many other sectors such as Banking, Insurance, Finance companies and Telecommunications companies with opening up of large number of branches across the country. For an example, Commercial Bank of Sri Lanka has increased its branches from 181 in 2009 to 256 in 2016 (Commercial Bank Annual Report – 2016). Many youth both male and female were attracted to that industry and the FMCG sector failed to attract them for the sales vacancies existed in their organizations.

Therefore, the demand for the Sales Representatives is increasing day by day with a limited supply. As a result, the turnover of the sales force has become an issue in many industries particularly in the area of FMCG industry. According to the points discussed above, the implication of losing Sales Representatives in this category has a fairly high negative impact on sales as well as the company image (Farris, 1971; Lucas et al., 1987; Johnston et al., 1990). Due to the high competition in FMCG industry and low barriers for consumers in Brand Switching, the moment a well-established Sales Rep leaves an area, the Competitors in that area try to take the full advantage of the opportunity by acquiring better display spaces within the outlets for their products removing the displays maintained by the leaving Sales Rep. That is mainly exploiting the opportunities in visibility and accessibility aspects at the point of sale which are very critical in the success of FMCG industry.

When inquired from many of the FMCG industry professionals across a vast spectrum of companies, it was unanimously confirmed that one of the problems that the entire industry has faced was the high turnover of Sales Force front liners.The negative impact of the Sales Force Turnover was listed as follows by the industry experts. Many of the same points have been confirmed by the respective researchers in the past.

1. The customer service in the vacant sales territories was badly affected thus creating long term negative impact on the company and products (Boles et al., 2012; Johnston et al., 1990)
2. Replacement cost was high (Griffeth and Horn, 2001; Ghosh, Piyali, RachitaSatyawadi, Jagdamba Prasad Joshi and Mohd.Shadman, 2013)
3. Productivity from the new recruits was low until they became familiar with company products and customers (DeConnick and Johnson 2009)
4. Badly affected the morale of the other sales representatives of the organization (Boles et al.,2012)
5. Leaving sales people approached and influenced their colleagues to leave the organization
6. When the leaving sales people joined competitors, they used their PR to covert the customers to buy from them
7. Competitors used the opportunity to grab the display spaces maintained by the leaving sales representative before the new recruit took control of the territory

Since this problem has already been identified by the industry leaders, it is important to understand the models they used and the challenges they faced in their endeavor to manage the situation. Under this topic, a study was conducted to identify the new models adopted by the FMCG companies in Sri Lanka today on organizational culture, compensation, sales force engagement and organizational commitment in order to arrest the situation.

Developing new models of organizational culture

Organization Culture is a concept discussed by many authors for a considerable period of time as an important element related to the sales force turnover. The literature reviewed indicates that there had been many efforts during 1980's to understand this concept. Many researches have proposed that there was a relationship between the organizational culture and the outcome of the performance of the employees of the organization. A key outcome was that the corporate culture of the organization was loosely affecting the performance and efficiency of the organization. Under the idea of Organizational culture affects the effectiveness, the well-known author on Organizational Culture Kilmann (1985) mentions that "Culture provides meaning, direction, and mobilization; it is the social energy that moves the corporation into allocation.., the energy that flows from shared commitments among group members."

Kerr and Slocum (1987) openly communicate in their Sales Force retention model that they believe the reward system plays a key role in influencing the organization culture. Their argument is based on that the concern about the organization's culture is all about how to control the behavior and attitude of its employees. They point out that the reward system is the best because when the employees are rewarded for following a certain behavior, it influences the culture to be formed towards a certain direction. Then the reward becomes an exchange between the employee and the organization for following a certain path. Who gets rewarded and why will be clearly understood by the employees and that will formulate the value system of the organization.

They explain how this reward system can be divided into two areas namely hierarchy based reward system and performance based reward system. As a result of the reward systems followed by the organizations, two different Cultures have emerged namely Clan Culture and Market culture. The reward system adopted by the Clan Culture was not well defined and it was a part of the organization's historical tradition. Superiors defined and evaluated the performance of the subordinates and it was defined quantitatively as well as qualitatively. There was a place for qualitative aspect within the Clan Culture. The reward system adopted by the Market Culture was linked to the performance and the qualitative aspects had almost zero recognition. Rewards were directly linked to specific performance criteria and the accountability of the employees was primarily for the results. This was considered by the sales representative as a rigid system and when they missed their targets due to the reasons beyond their control, they lost the income. The losing of remuneration demoralize Sales People and finally result in attrition(Jaramillo, Fernando, Jay PrakashMulki and William B. Locander, 2006; Johnson et al., 2000; Mengiis, 1996; Purani and Sahadev, 2008; Sager,1990; Siguaw et al., 1994;Wren et al., 2014).

Therefore many FMCG companies attempted to create a sales force friendly culture which can be defined as a hybrid of both clan and market cultures. Although the sales targets and other incentive related criteria were clearly defined by the organization, the Regional Sales Manager (RSM) or the National Sales Manager (NSM) was empowered with the authority of waving off some of the elements based on their qualitative aspects. Under the new approach, the uncontrollable factors were considered in favor to the Sales Representative. When they missed the target due to sudden natural disasters in the territory, non-availability of stocks in the company or mismanagement of funds by the distributor etc., still the RSM or NSM authorized the full or part of the incentive for the sales representative based on the situation.

At the same time, many FMCG companies in Sri Lanka encouraged socialization of the management of the organization with the sales force. In contrary to the previous practice of holding monthly or quarterly meeting in the city where the head office is located, the Regional Conferences were introduced. That was held within the area of the RSM only with his sales team and many managers from the head office attended the conference. It was encouraged to socialize with the sales team after the conference. During these sessions, the management had a chance to get close to the sales people and identify their concerns. If they found signs of unrest in one or more of the sales people, they had the time to take action before it was too late.

Therefore it is advisable for FMCG Companies in Sri Lanka to study the Kerr and Slocum (1987) clan culture model to manage the high sales force turnover. The characteristics of Clan Culture are mentioned below.

The relationship between individual and organization:

- Fraternal relationship
- Mutual long-term commitment
- Rests on mutual interests, a shared fate
- Sense of tradition, history, company, style

• Hierarchy structures relationship

The relationship among organization members:

• Pride in membership
• Sense of interdependence, identification with peers
• Extensive collegial network
• Pressure from peers to conform
• Stresses collective rather than individual initiative, ownership

The process of acculturation:

• Long, thorough socialization
• Superiors are mentors, role models, agents of socialization
• "Rich" normative structure governs wide range of behaviors

Inventing new compensation models

In the broader area of Employee Turnover, Cotton and Tuttle (1986) during their meta-analysis have selected possible correlates of staff turnover and are classified into 3 groups namely External factors, Structural or work-related factors and Personal characteristics of the employees. Cotton and Tuttle (1986) have studied 26 different factors and the final analysis in their model has proven that there is a strong correlation on 16 factors with employee turnover towards the positive or negative direction.

A similar study has been conducted by Ghosh et al (2013) explaining the factors predicting employees intention to stay. They have produced a very important summary of factors influencing employee retention based on the research work done by many searchers in the past. Therefore it is correct to mention that the Compensation as one of the important factors responsible for employee’s intention to leave or stay with the organization (Jaramillo et al. 2006;Johnson et al., 2000; Mengiis, 1996;Purani and Sahadev, 2008;Sager ,1990;Siguaw et al., 1994;Wren et al., 2014).

Many FMCG Companies in Sri Lanka followed a compensation model of low salary with a commission on sales turnover during 1980s and early years of 1990s (Show Wallace, Darley

Butler, Delmege Forsyth, Muller and Phipps, BCC etc.) Even during the same period, most of the multinational and some local FMCG Companies followed a fixed incentive scheme as the variable compensation (Lever Brothers, Nestle, Union Carbide, Maharajas, Upali etc.). Gradually the sales commission method disappeared and almost all the leading FMCG companies adapted to a sales incentive system fixed to the monthly sales targets. These targets were mostly fixed on the sales turnover and sometimes fixed to the volume or value of a certain product category. In some cases it was a mix of the both. The important element is the reward system. Reward systems are concerned with two major issues; how to evaluate the performances and how to reward them accordingly (Kerr and Slocum 1987).

During the first decade of the new millennium, the companies allocated a 70% to 75% of the total earnable income of a sales representative into the incentive or variable component. They maintained a somewhat low salary and encouraged sales force to deliver the numbers and earn more than double of their salary through incentives. Most of the time, the incentives had scales and to earn that maximum incentive, the sales representatives had to deliver well over 100% of the given monthly target. The positive element of this method was that the company did not have a heavy fixed cost on maintaining the sales force and their pay out was high only when the sales representatives delivered the targets.

However this system had a fundamental negative element when the focus of the company was onlyon the target achievement of the sales person. Due to this, the focus of the sales team was more skewed towards selling in to high volume outlets forgetting small outlets thus affecting the availability of the products. Also sometimes their focus on market hygiene and merchandising was minimal and those two are extremely important in the success of FMCG business.The effect of this mistakes boomeranged on the companies with high market returns of damaged and expired products. Therefore the companies had to introduce penalty system for the sales representatives linked to their incentive earnings. The penalties were imposed on market returns, account receivables, distribution gaps etc. and it became an industry norm within a very short period of time. As a result of this new development, the total income of the sales representatives was affected since now they had to juggle with many performance parameters simultaneously. It was no more a game of pushing stocks into the outlets without having much concern on the consequences. A good compensation plan reduces the need for close monitoring of all the activities performed by the sales force (Coughlan and Narasimham 1992).

As we discussed earlier, when many employment opportunities were opening up during the post war period in Sri Lanka, these correction methods adopted by the companies were noticed as barriers of earning the full income promised by the companies to the sales people. Sales force turnover slowly became a burning issue to the entire industry and therefore the companies had to take remedial actions with regard to the compensation. In order to emphasize the importance of doing a professional duty by the sales force, companies did not want to compromise on all qualitative measures lined to the incentive earnings. If they scrapped that off, the message to the sales force could have been only to sell at the expense of all other important elements. Therefore most of the FMCG companies increased salaries to ensure the sales people were getting a reasonable fixed income and continued the penalties imposed on the incentive. As a result of the increased salaries, the ratio between salary and incentives came to a level of approximately 40:60 in general although it is not the same when you look at some organizations.

Madhani (2011) suggests a sales force compensation model linked to the PLC (Product Life Cycle) of the products. This is a valid framework since the efforts from the sales force varies at different stages of the product life cycle. However this cannot be practically implemented since most of the FMCG companies in Sri Lanka who face the sales force turn over problem market a basket of products. These products are at different stages of the PLC and therefore it is difficult to come out with a simple incentive model. However, this could be a good idea for a new FMCG company enters into the market with new range of products.

In general, the total pay increases with the sales volume handled by the sales person, average industry salary, educational level and seniority with the company (Coughlan and Narasimham 1992). But the problem faced by the FMCG companies in Sri Lanka is finding innovative ways to attract sales front liners while protecting their members. Therefore they need to increase the fixed salary while offering an attractive incentive to retain them.

Models in engaging sales force on business decisions

The level of employee engagement is positively related to the business unit performances such as sales turnover, productivity, loyalty and customer satisfaction(Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L.t al., 2002). When the salesman perceives that he is an active participant in determining the company policies and standards that affect him, he tends to be happier with those policies and standards as well as with the other members of his firm who administer and implement them (Churchill, G.A. Jr., Ford, N.M., and Walker O.C.,1976)

Until the Sri Lankan FMCG companies faced with the problem of high sales force turnover, a little or no attention was paid in their new business development models to engage sales team. Most of the companies considered that the members of the sales force should be kept outside of all new business developments with the idea of that the products developed by the company should be consumer focused and therefore no need to have sales involvement. And also they had the fear of leaking the information to the trade due to the close relationship the sales force maintained with the customers.

This situation changed gradually when the FMCG industry realized the value of the customers which in this case was the trade. With the development of theModern Trade (Supermarkets) and other chain outlets, the customer had a say on the products they wanted to stock in their outlets. These new channels became popular amongst consumers claiming a sizable volume of the FMCG business and therefore the companies could not ignore them any longer. That paved the way for many organizations to get the sales force involved more and more at the designing stage of the new products. Because the sales force had the relationship with those powerful customers and had the ability to advise the marketing colleagues on the acceptability of those new products to those trade channels. Even after developing products, when the company wanted to communicate to the consumer using merchandising materials, the company got the sales force involved since they were the people who were using them in the market. Their knowledge on how those materials could be used in the trade significantly contributed towards the success of consumer communication. This situation motivated the sales team.

Models in developing organizational commitment of the sales people

In the broader terms, the organizational commitment can be described as the bond between the employees and the organization. The employees who are committed towards the organization feel they are connected to the organization and their identity in the society also related to the organization. Some say it is the employee’s psychological attachment to the organization. Since Normative Commitment is better understood as a pre-entry commitment propensity, Affective commitment is the psychological attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is emotionally involved in, and feels a strong sense of belonging to the organization (Ghosh and Swamy 2014).

Salespeople who identify with and are involved in their organization presumably want to maintain membership in the organization and exert effort on its behalf (Mowday R.T., Steers R.M., and Porter R.C., 1979). Thus, they are less likely to intend to leave the organization. This situation is directly linked to the job satisfaction of the sales people. Many research outcomes have indicated that in particularly in sales, the organizational commitment is affected positively by job satisfaction (Johnston et al., 1990; Brown and Peterson, 1993). Salesforcesthat derive pleasure from their jobs are more likely to identify with and be involved in their organization.

The tools to develop overall organizational commitment of the sales force depends on a wide spectrum of activities centered on that. But the focus of this study will limit the findings on the above point on how the organizations implemented certain measures to link the sales rep with the organization in the market place and society at large. Some of the multinational companies operated in Sri Lanka commenced this model many decades back by branding their vehicles and providing shirts, ties, T-shirts with the brands of the company embossed (Bristol, Gold Leaf, Nespray, Maggi, Anchor etc.). During the decade after the new millennium it was evident that many FMCG Companies started branding their sales trucks without considering whether it belonged to the distributor or the company to leverage on the advertising value of the action. This investment paved a way to improve the identity of the sales person linked to the company. Identifying sales person linked to the organization is positively related to the organizational commitment (Wren et al., 2014; Sager 1990). Even a new sales representative (or a senior sales rep taking over a new sales territory) did not have to use more efforts to introduce themselves to the outlets. The moment they reached the shop or the market with the branded sales truck, he was immediately identified as the sales representative of the respective organization.

For many decades Sri Lanka has a tradition of sales representatives wearing a tie despite the very hot weather to help the outlet owners to differentiate and identify them from the usual customers patronizing their outlets. Still this is being continued at a larger scale. When inquired from senior sales representatives in the FMCG organizations, it was mentioned that the dealers didn’t show the same respect to those who did the same job but did not wear a tie. Some of the dealers considered them as Salesmen from small companies and did not show the same courtesy displayed to the Sales Representatives from established organizations. However this situation was limited until the sales person was known and got familiar with the trade and developed their PR in the market. Therefore some FMCG companies now influence their sales representatives to wear Branded T-Shirts provided by the company during the work while a large number of companies have instructed to do that on a selected day of the week (Ex. Fridays etc.).

'Sense of oneness' is a point that has been identified by the organizations as another important factor to develop organizational commitment of the employees (Brown and Peterson 1993, Churchill et al., 1976; Kilmann 1985). Therefore the FMCG companies in the current context have implemented many activities to thrive on this point. It was evident during the discussion had with organizations that many of them now maintain a direct and continues dialogue with the members of the sales force regarding all achievement of the organization. It is no more limited only for sales administration and marketing instruction communications with the sales force. Whatever the achievement the company attains, they are shared with the sales force. It may be an achievement in international, national or regional level. It may be on quality, CSR, brand related, customer or supplier related. All those positive information are shared with the members of the sales force. Sometimes Sales people will reach the head office once in 2 or 3 months from their sales territories far away in the distant parts of the country, but these communications keep their organizational commitment at the peak since they too take pride on these achievements of their organizations. Now it is common to see that sometimes the members of the sales force are invited to these award ceremonies and to appear in media along with others which is a display of the recognition of their role within the company.

Conclusion

Although sales people are physically detached from the company, they are also affected by the organizational culture (Schwepker 1999;Purani and Sahadev 2008). Due to the physical detachment of the sales force from the Company especially in FMCG industry, it is somewhat difficult to identify their satisfaction or frustration towards the organization. Therefore it can be accurately identified only by looking at the attrition levels and comparing them with the other functions of the organization or with the historical data. Because the job satisfaction is strongly related to the sales force turnover (Boles et al. 2012; Brown and Peterson 1993; Churchill et al., 1976;Ghosh et al., 2013). Sometimes it is possible to compare them with other companies in the industry but unfortunately the information across the entire FMCG industry in Sri Lanka is not available. This report was compiled by studying literature and interviewing industry experts and senior sales representatives in the FMCG industry in Sri Lanka. It can be reasonably stated that the industry experts have accepted that the sales force turnover is one of the biggest challenges faced by them at present that has a major impact on the performances of the organization. Also it can be mentioned that although they have made some attempts to arrest the situation using their own strategies, the outcome is not satisfactory. Therefore the most common method of fulfilling their requirement has been to identify sales representatives of other companies in the area where the vacancy exists using their Area/Regional Mangers and get them on board by offering a higher compensation package. Remuneration is a strong motivational factor for sales people's turnover (Jaramillo et al. 2006; Johnson et al., 2000; Mengiis, 1996; Purani and Sahadev , 2008; Sager ,1990; Siguaw et al., 1994;Wren et al., 2014). Although they are hired on desperation, this action has created some internal conflicts since these new members come on board with a higher package than some of the senior existing cadre. This is a never ending process that leads to nowhere. Therefore it can be concluded that this is an area where researchers can contribute to the FMCG industry in Sri Lanka for their problem solving efforts by conducting further studies in this area.

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