Research on opinions and attitudes of bookseller and increasing retail sales in the sales of books, through staff training

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Abstract. During the economic crisis, retail sales in the book sales dropped sharply. Businesses are not many options. Costs must be reduced quickly, due to reduced turnover. Very often this means the release of personnel and cost reduction benefits and salary. This analysis aims to explore attitudes, professional competence and motivation of staff and to provide evidence of the need to further their education.

Keywords: increasing retail sales, sales of books, staff training

JEL Codes: M 31

1. Introduction

An enquiry has been performed within the period, as from 01.02. up to 30.03.2011, addressed to Havel Company staff. It is an organization which mainly deals with bookselling, disposing of bookshops in almost all of the large cities in Bulgaria. The real denomination of the above mentioned Company has been substituted by other one, due its Governing Body unwillingness to communicate some concrete facts concerning the function and the activity of this economic organization. The number of the enquired people have run up to 43, from 12 commercial retail units in Bulgaria. Some of the bookshops are located in the same town or city, - generally, in the large residential areas, - while in the smaller towns or localities there is a single commercial unit only to function. The enquiry has been conducted during the meetings held with Company staff, through filling in of a questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of 9 questions structured into 3 (three) main blocks: Block A – Demographic; Block B – Self-assessment of professional competencies; Block C – Factors of motivation.

This study has been assigned by the Governing Body of Havel Company. Its performing has been inspired by the aspiration on the part of the Manager Team to go on in search of additional potential in the person of the Company staff, through a profiled training, with the objective to increase the volume of the bookselling.

This study has been provoked by the necessity of looking for proves in pros or cons the affirmation saying that booksellers miss such a professional preparation which could enable them to fulfill successfully, at a maximum, their obligations, of finding and examining the factors of a determining role for the achievement of a significantly improved quality of supply and sale of the product. Subsequently, it is provided, on the basis of the presented results, the application of specific methods for booksellers’ training in selling books and other affined products (as musical disks, entertaining games, geographic maps, electronic dictionaries and encyclopedias are, as well as other similar ones, generally offered by the bookshops), in case the results arising from that enquiry evidence a need of a further profiled training. Along with what afore said, taking into consideration those trends which could be outlined in staff inclination and motivation, some eventual improvements would be proposed in the organization, to begin
with an extra stimulation to be offered to the booksellers, thus making possible an increase of sales intensity and volume.

2. **Exposure**

The study, which has been performed, aims at stating the need of an additional training within the sphere of the retail sales and more precisely, of books sales (as much as such goods are characterized by their specifics and profitable sale, a sufficient professional preparation of the booksellers is presumed to be obtained for that purpose).

**Object of study:** professional competencies of Havel Company staff.

**Subject of study:** Company Havel staff itself.

**Methods of performing the study:**
- Direct inquire;
- Interviewing and observation;
- Desk research;
- Comparative analysis;
- Structural analysis;
- Processing of the enquiries data and the results obtained from, using SPSS;

**Main task:** It comprises a study of the staff professional competencies as regards to bookselling, the motives which stimulate the personnel to make greater efforts in that process, and the elaboration of appropriate methods for the training of the staff, on the basis of the total results that are to be obtained.

**Subtasks:**
- Preparation and elaboration of the respective enquiry, appropriate for the purpose;
- Determination of the most important professional competencies of the staff as regards to books sales using the self-assessment methods for the purpose;
- Elaboration of an appropriate enquiry;
- Conducting of the enquiry;
- Processing of the results obtained from it;
- Analysis of the obtained results;
- Drawing of deductions and conclusions;
- Presentation of the methods for the training of the staff within the sphere of the profitable sales.

**Objectives of the study:**
- Examination of the booksellers` opinion, disposition and attitude to the main steps and techniques of the selling process;
- Elaboration of an appropriate enquiry which should be directly conducted on the basis of interviewing;
- Approval or rejection of the main hypothesis and the sub-hypotheses;
- Summarizing the results arisen from the conducted analysis with the purpose to deduce conclusions from it;
- Formulating of recommendations;
Preparation of appropriate methods for the training of the staff within the retail sale on the basis of booksellers’ opinion, disposition and attitude, as well as of the recommendations given to them.

**Hypothesis:**

The main hypothesis says the dispositions characteristic for Havel Company staff are of various nature; though, it may be considered, first of all, the booksellers determine themselves as good professionals.

**Sub-hypotheses:**

- The booksellers are convinced to be quite familiar with single stages of the selling process and to have a good command of them;
- The booksellers need to improve the techniques of selling through training in that sphere;
- The booksellers need an extra stimulation that could contribute to an increase of the sales volume.

The software product SPSS is being used for data processing and analysis, and due to its unlimited possibilities, an extremely detailed examination of the problems has been achieved.

2.1. **Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratio between women and men booksellers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>84.75%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15.25%</strong></td>
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Figure 1 shows the data about the sex of the staff employed by Havel Company.

It is evidenced by the results, women, working for the organization, are predominant and their share amounts at 84.75% which means that men are 15.25% only. The reasons for such an unequal distribution are two. As a first, it is a tradition that the places of work within the retail sales sector are predominantly filled by female representatives, which is especially typical for the lowest positions. As a second, there is the explanation that the wages and salaries in such positions are usually far from being high, and that is why such kind of job is seldom approved by the stronger sex representatives. To a certain extent, that distribution by sex is positive for the Company and its Governing Body objectives as a minimal increment of wages and salaries or an introduction of a stimulating system of payment would incite its staff to implement greater efforts into fulfillment of its duties, and most of all – in bookselling.

Figure 2 represents the summarized results obtained from the enquiry to the booksellers and from the question saying: “How do you assess your own professional competencies?”, respectively. What makes impression is the fact the greatest percentage of the inquired people have graded themselves of a “good” score taking into consideration the score scale from two to five. That means, slightly more than the half of the booksellers, and precisely, 54.02%, have placed themselves on a comparatively high position as regards to their professional standing (self-confidence). In the second place, there is the group of the self-
graded of “very good”, amounting at 31, 68%; such results are considered another proof for a good self-confidence of the staff to its own possibilities and competencies.

![Graph of Self-assessment of professional competence of booksellers](image)

**Figure 2. Self-assessment of booksellers’ professional competencies.**

To a certain extent, such a high self-assessment (where a circumstance is taken into account that all of the self-graded, put together, amount at 85, 7%) may be explained by the fact there are young people who prevail in the teams and their experience is still far from making them estimate de facto their own competencies, as there are more than 10 000 titles to be supplied by the Company, but the green age of the employees logically does not enable them to get familiar with all of the above mentioned titles. That is the sequence of thoughts, exposed by the Governing Body and the affirmation, which has resulted from, that the booksellers have a much greater potential, but it is not fully exploited.

The data, taken by Figure 2 show, however, there are also some members of the team, who have self-graded themselves of a “2” (poor) score. Their percentage is relatively low, amounting at 1, 05% only; so, those people may be ignored for the needs of the analysis, as much as it results evident, some of them have been working at bookshops for a few weeks only. Summarizing, it is to be affirmed, on the basis of the Graphic 2, that the booksellers’ grading is a good sign of their self-confidence to their professional competencies. Even in such a case when it is accepted they have a too high positioning of their key capacities, it might be used in their further training, as much as it would motivate them to rise to much more positive qualities and to get familiar with better techniques which should make them better booksellers. The high self-assessment may become also a barrier to training. A part of individuals presumably boycott the idea itself of training exposing the argument that “they are already good enough at selling, being perfectly familiar with the product they sell; so, there is nothing new that merits to be learnt by them. “

**Figure 3. It represents the results obtained from the reply given to the above mentioned question “Do you say good morning / afternoon to the customers entering the bookshop?”**. It is extremely important for the staff to know every single stage of the retail sales process, as there is an idea to make the sales rise revealing all and any irregularity and gaps omitted by the booksellers. The customer has the sense to be an always welcome guest. And it very often may result decisive for the exit of the customer`s visit to the shop,
or the bookstore, respectively. That is the reason, the answers may direct the study to achievement of purposes. What makes impression, in the first place, is the highest result gained by the booksellers greeting only their regular customer. These booksellers’ percentage amounts at 32, 8%; that result definitely need a special comment, as the regular customers are very important and cannot be underestimated, being already won over for “us”: the fact itself proving that the customers are regular states they have already made their choice in “our pro”.

![Bar Graph: Reply to booksellers to the question: "I greet all customers who enter the bookstore?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not salute</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I greet only the regular customers</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I congratulate only nod, I congratulate almost all clients</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I congratulate always</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Booksellers’ answer to the question saying: “Do you say good morning / afternoon to the customers entering the bookshop? “

Such reflections do not mean, at all, that saying good morning or good afternoon to regular customers is wrong: what they rather intend to express is the following: if it is almost one third of all the booksellers to say good morning or good afternoon to their regular customers, it is a sign the personnel attention should be pointed to that same moment of welcome which is so important for any potential user. The amicable welcome is the very first step of the potential commercial process. It must not be forgotten shops exist to sell goods (services) welcoming customers. Along with that, the subdivision of the customers to regular and sporadic and, respectively, the sense that there are only regular customers who merit being welcomed, might keep at a significant distance those buyers who could guess such a misbehavior. The second position of 21, 9% is held by those booksellers who are next to say always welcome to all the customers entering the bookshop. That percentage is insufficient; and that is why the staff needs a clarifying of the act of welcoming and its significant importance for the exit or result of the selling. There is also another fact that is of interest: the share of booksellers who never welcome customers. That share amounts at 13, 1% and almost overlaps with the share of the newly hired people, though it cannot be a good excuse for such a misbehavior. In conclusion, on the basis of the results shown by Graphic 3, it may be summarized that there is an unequal necessity to clarify how important that welcome is to be said to the customers entering the commercial unit. The question 5 of the enquiry, given to the booksellers to be filled in by them, was saying: “Do you ask appropriate introductory questions to your customers? “ There is no doubt, a good trained retailer should be quite familiar with the process of selling and its single stages. A
series of authors who are specialists working within the area of profitable sales express their opinion that good results in the sale sphere can be achieved by optimization of the entire process of contacting and of the attitude to the customer (see Tom Hopkins, Philip Cottler and others, Martin Limbeck and others).

Figure 4. Answers to the question saying: “Do you ask appropriate introductive questions?“

For that reason, the author does also express the same opinion that it is possible to increase the sales of books only in case each member of the booksellers’ team is quite familiar with the process of profitable sales, being able to follow and apply it. The answer to the question pointed under number five in the questionnaire is indicative showing the staff ability to cope successfully with the next stage of the bookselling process (after saying welcome to the customer). But the results from the enquiry have rather shown uncertainty on booksellers’ part. That trend is expressed by the opinion of those 39, 9% (thirty nine comma nine percentages) of the enquired people who “think to ask true questions”. That same answer, by itself, reveals staff uncertainty as regards to one of the most important stages of the selling process. The communication between customer and seller lays on the basis of this process. A task of a primary importance for the bookseller does include not only establishment of a contact with the customer (user), by asking him true and purposeful questions, but to discover the customer’s needs (if necessary, even to create them) and to satisfy them. The only way to discover, as soon as possible, and to satisfy, as fully as possible, the customer’s needs, is to enter into an intensive conversation of information exchange between the two parties: the seller and the customer. It is appropriate to point attention to that same share of booksellers’ who are convinced in their abilities to dialog with customer(s), precisely the 12, 1% (twelve comma one percentages) of the enquired. Author`s opinion is that same share is too insufficient. The introductive questions, if are true, point the dialog to a direction that most often results decisive for the exit of the entire selling process. They predispose the customer to start a conversation where to share not only what is that to lead him to that same commercial unit (bookshop) but what exactly he needs. Such a constructive dialog led by a professionally trained merchant is the only way the seller could present the available and appropriate variants that would be able to cover the customer’needs. There are 5, 3% of the enquired who have answered the following: “I think,… I`m afraid I don`t ask appropriate questions “, while other 15, 3% of them have also gone nearer to “ the team “ of the unsure after replying that “ “I`m afraid, I`d rather miss to ask appropriate questions.“ Summarizing the results given by Figure 4, an unique
A deduction can be drawn out as a proof that the staff, employed by Havel Company, needs further professional training within the retail sale sphere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Booksellers’ evaluation on customers’ awareness and demand</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>customers do not know what they are looking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customers rarely know what they are looking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some customers know what they are looking, some do not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customers rather know what they are looking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customers always know what they are looking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Booksellers’ evaluation on customers’ awareness and demand.

Figure 5. It presents information about booksellers’ evaluation on customers’ awareness and demand. That same question provides information that may be directed to several points. In the first place, the sellers, in a very short time, - often in a few minutes of observation and having a few words with a customer only, - shall be able to make their judgment on what type of temperament their customer seems to be. Such a fast “scanning” is often a very ability which usually is obtained by the seller in a couple of years of experience or through a good preparation, attainment and purposeful training. It is the type of the customer to suggest to the bookseller what kind of behavior should better correspond to his temperament.

This study does not comprise more details about the types of temperaments or the possibilities to classify the different kinds of customers, due to the restricted volume of the publication. The right “scanning” applied to customers offers a possibility to the seller for a fast orientation as regards to customers’ wishes and needs. Faster the sellers assess about what precisely their customer looks for, longer the time will be at sellers’ disposal for paying the needed attention to all and any customers who are present in that same commercial unit (the bookshop), taking into consideration that the bookseller very often ought to serve contemporaneously several clients.

The proper recognition of the customer type is a key to the supply of the most appropriate product which should satisfy to the maximum customer’s needs. There is nearly one third of the enquired whose opinion is that “some customers know what they look for while other don’t know it”. That reply comes to support again the trend, already expressed by the previous questions: that a certain instability is perceived among the Company’s staff. The result is contradictive to that conclusion which has been initially drawn out and evidenced in figure 2. According to that figure, 85% of the enquired booksellers have self-assessed as good and very good professionals. Such a discrepancy is comprehensible, as the booksellers aspire to be completely and successfully realizable traders. That ambition is understandable as it is typical for each and any individual who trends to gain professional success. As for the negative answer to the question pointed out in Figure 5, it is rather explained by a necessity of acquisition of greater certainty and confidence in professional competencies (if the members of the team are recently employed, it is evident they miss both certainty and self-confidence). In the opinion expressed by one tenth of the enquired booksellers, “the customers always know what exactly they look for” while slightly more of the booksellers amounting at 14,
2%, think that “the customers have no idea, at all, about what they look for”. Such contradictive results prove once more that the opinion of the majority of the staff is quite unevenly distributed in differing answers. Such kind of discrepancy indicates uncertainty. Summarizing the results drawn out of the Figure 5, it is to be affirmed the staff employed by Havel Company would fulfill more successfully its duties related to the increase of the sales volume if it is able to “scan” better and faster its customers and to guess their needs. Even in cases when “the customer has no idea about what he looks for”, the good trader/seller must point out on his main task to identify and satisfy such unconscious needs to bring to a profitable end the bookselling process which means “a satisfied customer and a realized sale”. Booksellers’ long year experience often leads to a gain of the “scanning” ability; however, it is to be underlined, the professionally oriented training can save many years of practice accumulation based on the principle of “trial, experience and error”.

![Booksellers’ self-assessment to their abilities to measure up to customers’ claims (objections)](image)

Figure 6. Booksellers’ self-assessment to their abilities to measure up to customers’ claims (objections).

Figure 6 summarizes the information resulted from the booksellers’ opinion on their abilities to manage with customers’ claims (objections). That stage is a part of the selling process, examining the customer’s “dissatisfaction” with product, service, price and all and any other possible things. Classifying objections is a very hard task, indeed, due to their variety; though, trials to systemize objections can be found out in profiled literature (see Herbert Paulerberg [7]). It is often mentioned, as regards to the retails, there are a lot of moments characteristic for the selling process when the customer expresses his or her uncertainty, when he or she needs more information about what to buy or when simply “plays some tricks”. All those stages are parts of the communicative process with the customer; so, that is why they should be also considered parts of the sale itself. Good traders believe their customers “troubles” are not a motive for anxiety but a mere possibility and even opportunity to a better presentation of the offer, so they try to add more valuable information to the previous one and to clarify in details of the advantages of the product offered by them. A bookseller who is well prepared would not cease to chase the objective of getting success in sales, even in case the customer expresses some objections regards to a product, because the seller is perfectly aware there techniques enabling him to cope with such problems. A seller who is talented has already achieved that secret system enabling him or her to overcome such objections, due his or her sense and most probably, his or her long year experience, but these methods can be also acquired through a purposeful training. For example, one of the most frequent objections “it is too expensive” could be suppressed by the suggestion of spreading the sum within a definite period or of a persuasion insisting that the product in sale might not even be expensive enough for “that matchless grandson or granddaughter”.

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The abilities to convince the customer require a series of steps that can be “promptly” learned. The skill of getting the objections properly under control is often a decisive moment in the selling process. For that reason, the staff employed by Havel Company, has been asked about its opinion on the question and about how it can estimate its own professional skills to be equal to customers’ worries. The greatest share of the enquired booksellers, amounting at 44, 7%, has replied they had rather measure up badly to customers’ claims (objections). What makes impression is also the share of those enquired who has recognize to be unable to cope with their customers’ worries. The opposite range of the scale, containing the answers of 2, 8% of the enquired booksellers, shows positive results given by those booksellers who are able to cope perfectly with claims. The deductions bring to a conclusion that the staff employed by Havel Company has been mastering with difficulties all the stages of the selling process. It may be summarized, the problem which has arisen is obviously serious, a defect revealed in the majority of the booksellers, which must be overcome. The management of each stage of the selling process plays a significantly important role for the achievement of the purposes, as it means, the realization of profitable sales.

**Answer of the question saying: ” How do you estimate the function between the efforts made in work and the remuneration received for? ”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>little effort, low reward</td>
<td>9,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little effort, high reward</td>
<td>0,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salary is equal to equal the efforts</td>
<td>14,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>much effort lower wages</td>
<td>72,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>much effort higher remuneration</td>
<td>2,8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7. Answer of the question saying: “How do you estimate the function between the efforts made in work and the remuneration received for? “

Figure 7 reflects the booksellers’ opinion on the function expressing the efforts made by the staff in its work and the wages (salaries) received for. It is beyond the extents of that problem to cover the staff motivation in its entire complexity, as the question is concentrated only onto one of the multiple nuances, and precisely, onto the merely financial aspect of booksellers’ satisfaction. The activities during the formation of the individual’ s personal motivation are an extremely complex and multilayer process, and the formation of the motives results from a series of factors. According to Zl. Karadzhova, the motivation is defined as “a wish to achievement of high levels of efforts regards to the organizational goals...” That definition satisfies author’ s search, as much as it supports the aspiration of the Managerial Leadership to identify the personnel with the organizational goals. As about the extent to what it meets reality, it has been clearly evidenced by the results shown in Graphic 7. The majority of the booksellers express a significant disposition to afore said function, and precisely, there are 72, 4% of them whose opinion is to make a lot of efforts in their work and to receive a low wage (salary) for it. The last place is filled by 0,8 % of the enquired, that is to say, by those ones whose opinion is opposite: less efforts implicated in work are highly paid. Summarizing the results drawn out of Graphic 7, it may be said there are several main trends.
Slightly over two third of the enquired are not well motivated to go on fulfilling strenuously and successfully the organizational goals which have been set to them. Indicators that uniquely demonstrate a presence of deficits in the system of the personnel wage (salary) formation, approved by Company. The personnel motivation is an important factor which influence onto achievement of the organizational goals, set to the staff, must not be underestimated. On that basis, author`s opinion supports the trend to improvement and perfection of the methods applicable to wage (salary) formation as an obligatory condition for personnel stimulation.

2.2. Conclusion

The research, conducted on the booksellers ` opinion, has been assigned by Havel Company Governing Body to produce evidence in pro or in con the set hypotheses. After performing a thorough data processing and analysis, the following results can be summarized: The first hypothesis can be accepted to be proved, due to the booksellers` point of view as regards to their own professional skills (see Graphic 2).

The second hypothesis cannot be accepted to be proved because of the rather differing opinions expressed by the booksellers as regards to the selling process, which is illustrated by Graphics from 3 up to 6. As a result arisen from the entire study, it can be uniquely concluded the booksellers need improvement of the selling techniques, which may be achieved through training. The data shown in the last graphic deduct evidences to confirm a presence of some deficits as regards to the extra stimulation that may contribute to an increase of the sales volume.

The personal sales are considered to play a decisive role for a short time achievement of the objectives set for the increase of the turnover. A good seller will be able to exert a positive influence, within a definite limits, onto the turnover of his or her section. Perhaps, there are no other marketing instruments of marketing communications, - as the personal conversation, carried on during the sales, is – which would be able to influence positively (negatively) onto the achievement of the marketing objectives. Along with that, it very often occurs that, through the bookseller himself, that fuzzy idea about a certain trade brand / service would become “personified “. According to the author, the organizational goals, set to the staff, could be reached through a profiled training and improvement of the stimulating system for motivation of Company personnel.

3. References