

THE PERSONALITY PROFILE OF A SUCCESSFUL SALES REPRESENTATIVE IN THE LIQUOR INDUSTRY

J.C.D. AUGUSTYN

W.S. DE VILLIERS

*Department of Industrial Psychology
University of Stellenbosch*

ABSTRACT

From a study of the relevant literature it is clear that in general characteristics of sales representatives, and their personality profile in particular, have not been clearly identified. The objective of this study was to seek clarification of this issue. Two instruments were used in the investigation; namely, the South African Personality Questionnaire and the Thurstone Temperament Schedule. These instruments were administered to 45 sales representatives in the liquor industry and it was established that successful and less successful sales representatives could be statistically differentiated in terms of personality profile.

OPSOMMING

Uit die relevante literatuur blyk dit duidelik dat die kenmerke van die verkoopsverteenwoordiger in die algemeen en sy persoonlikheidsprofiel in die besonder nie duidelik omlyn is nie. Die doelwit van hierdie studie was om groter duidelikheid in dié verband te verkry. Twee instrumente is in die ondersoek gebruik nl. die Suid-Afrikaanse Persoonlikheidsvraelys en die Thurstone Temperament Schedule. Hierdie instrumente is geadminestreer aan 'n steekproef van 45 verkoopsverteenwoordigers in die drankbedryf en daar is bevind dat suksesvolle en minder suksesvolle verkoopsverteenwoordigers statisties gedifferensieër kan word in terme van hul persoonlikheidsprofile.

Some organization and clarity of thought can be accomplished in the study of effective sales representatives by considering several of the approaches that have been used. Early approaches used an inductive procedure, attempting to explain salesmanship on the basis of traits and personal characteristics of successful salesmen. Early ideas as to what makes a good sales representative therefore consisted of lists of personal characteristics and traits of the sales representative himself.

Some of these lists contained criteria such as height, age, appearance, education and experience. Other criteria were normally generated by psychological tests and included, for example, aggressiveness, dominance, extrovertedness, optimism and competitive spirit (Greenberg & Bern, 1972; Motoaki, Oda & Kimuri, 1972; Carlton, 1974; Haas & Ernest, 1969; Pedersen & Wright, 1976). Crissy & Kaplan (1969) refer to personality requirements such as social sensitivity, flexibility, drive, appropriate temperamental qualities, emotional maturity, motivation, self-reliance, compensatory adjustment and sublimative adjustment. They claim that, because of the unstructured situational nature of the "selling" job, the key requirement of a sales representative is the need to anticipate and adjust to change. Apart from personality requirements the sales representative most probably needs intellectual endowment, planning skills, communication skills and a character which is consistent and normal.

Considerable questioning and criticism have been directed at the use of personality instruments in the

study of consumer behaviour (Villani & Wind, 1975). The principal criticism is that it is questionable whether personality instruments measure the appropriate personality traits since they were designed for other purposes. Though there are many controversies in the area of personality research it can be safely assumed that personality differences do exist and that they can at least partly explain the success or failure of a sales representative.

Other approaches in the search to determine the profile of the successful sales representative centered around more complex traits such as ego drive and empathy (Britt, 1970). Stimulus-response theory saw sales representatives as being able to elicit desired responses if they could provide the correct stimuli, while need satisfaction theory postulated that the sales representative would be successful if he could identify the prospect's (customer's) needs and turn them into buying motives.

Reference is also made in the literature to different models of customer-salesperson interaction (Engel, Blackwell & Kollat, 1978). According to these models the outcome of a sale is the result of the interaction between the salesperson and customer rather than a result of the individual qualities of the different parties considered in isolation. Although there are differences between a sales representative and a salesperson the personality factor will without doubt in both cases influence the interaction process between the buyer and the seller.

It therefore appears that the general characteristics of sales representatives, and personality profile in particular, have not been clearly identified. It is, however, widely recognized that personality tests can provide a good indication of certain aspects of the successful sales representative although such tests are far from

perfect (Anderson, 1981). Although the problem is obviously complex and theories directly addressing the issue are limited, this study attempts to gain some clarification as to the personality profile of a successful sales representative.

METHODOLOGY

In order to statistically determine whether there are significant differences between the personality profiles of successful and less successful sales representatives in the liquor industry, the following strategy was followed:

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this investigation, namely the *South African Personality Questionnaire* (Steyn, 1974) and the *Thurstone Temperament Schedule* (Thurstone, 1950). Both these instruments have been used in numerous previous studies and have been found to be exceptionally valid and reliable (Steyn, 1974; Thurstone, 1950).

The South African Personality Questionnaire (SAPQ) was developed by the National Institute for Personnel Research and has been used extensively in the South African business world. The personality characteristics measured by this questionnaire are social responsiveness, anxiety, hostility, rigidity and dominance.

The Thurstone Temperament Schedule is limited to a practical description of important aspects of temperament. It is designed to assess those traits which are

relatively permanent for each person and excludes those which reflect recent social experience, social identifications, disturbing experiences or exposure to propaganda. Seven areas of temperament are appraised in a relatively short questionnaire; namely, activity, vigorousness, impulsiveness, dominance, emotional stability, sociability and reflectiveness (Thurstone, 1950).

The Sample

The instruments were completed by a sample of 45 sales representatives, employed by a company in the liquor industry, in two test sessions lasting approximately 90 minutes each.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The data was split into two groups, (high and low performance) by means of performance ratings obtained from the company and then submitted to a profile analysis (Nunnally, 1978). In this process the BMDP (3D) computer programme and a Univac computer were used.

Two tests of statistical significance were utilised in this study. The first was Hotelling's T-test, used to determine whether an overall significant difference between the profiles of the two groups could be identified. Second, to assess significant difference between the profiles of the two groups, t-tests (considering all the variables) were calculated, in order to determine which individual variables differentiated significantly between high and low performing sales representatives.

TABLE 1
SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PROFILES OF
HIGH AND LOW PERFORMING SALES REPRESENTATIVES

| Variables | Average Score High Performers | Average Score Low Performers* | t |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|
| Social responsiveness (SAPQ) | 13.54 | 8.71 | 5.66* |
| Anxiety (SAPQ) | 7.37 | 10.75 | 3.18** |
| Dominance (SAPQ) | 11.22 | 6.28 | 3.54** |
| Active (TTS) | 16.25 | 11.94 | 5.25** |
| Dominant (TTS) | 47.77 | 35.17 | 3.52** |
| Stable (TTS) | 65.33 | 49.85 | 3.84** |

* Split based on company performance ratings
Hotelling $T^2 = 79.85$; $F = 5.59$; $p < .001$

** $p < .001$

RESULTS

The results of this investigation are shown in Table 1.

From Table 1 the following could reasonably be deduced:

- There is a significant difference between the personality profiles of the high and low performing sales representatives (Hotelling $T^2 = 79.85$; $F = 5.59$; $p < .001$).
- There are significant differences between successful and less successful sales representatives in three of the sub-scales of the SAPQ (Social Responsiveness, Anxiety and Dominance) as well as in three of the sub-scales of the Thurstone Temperament Schedule (Active, Dominant, Stable).
- In behavioural terms it would appear that a successful sales representative possesses the following characteristics:

Social Responsiveness: Seeks out and enjoys social

encounter, spontaneously initiates social contact and responds to others in an outgoing and warm hearted way.

Tranquillity: Behaves in a relaxed way, is always at ease, unruffled, unperturbed and calm.

Dominance: Takes an assertive and dominant role in social relations, constantly and actively strives to be in a position of authority, displays a considerable amount of drive.

Active: Usually works and moves rapidly, is restless whenever he has to be quiet and likes to be "on the go".

Stable: (Emotionally stable). Is usually cheerful and has an even disposition. He is not irritated if interrupted when concentrating and is not annoyed by having a task interrupted or by having to finish it by a deadline.

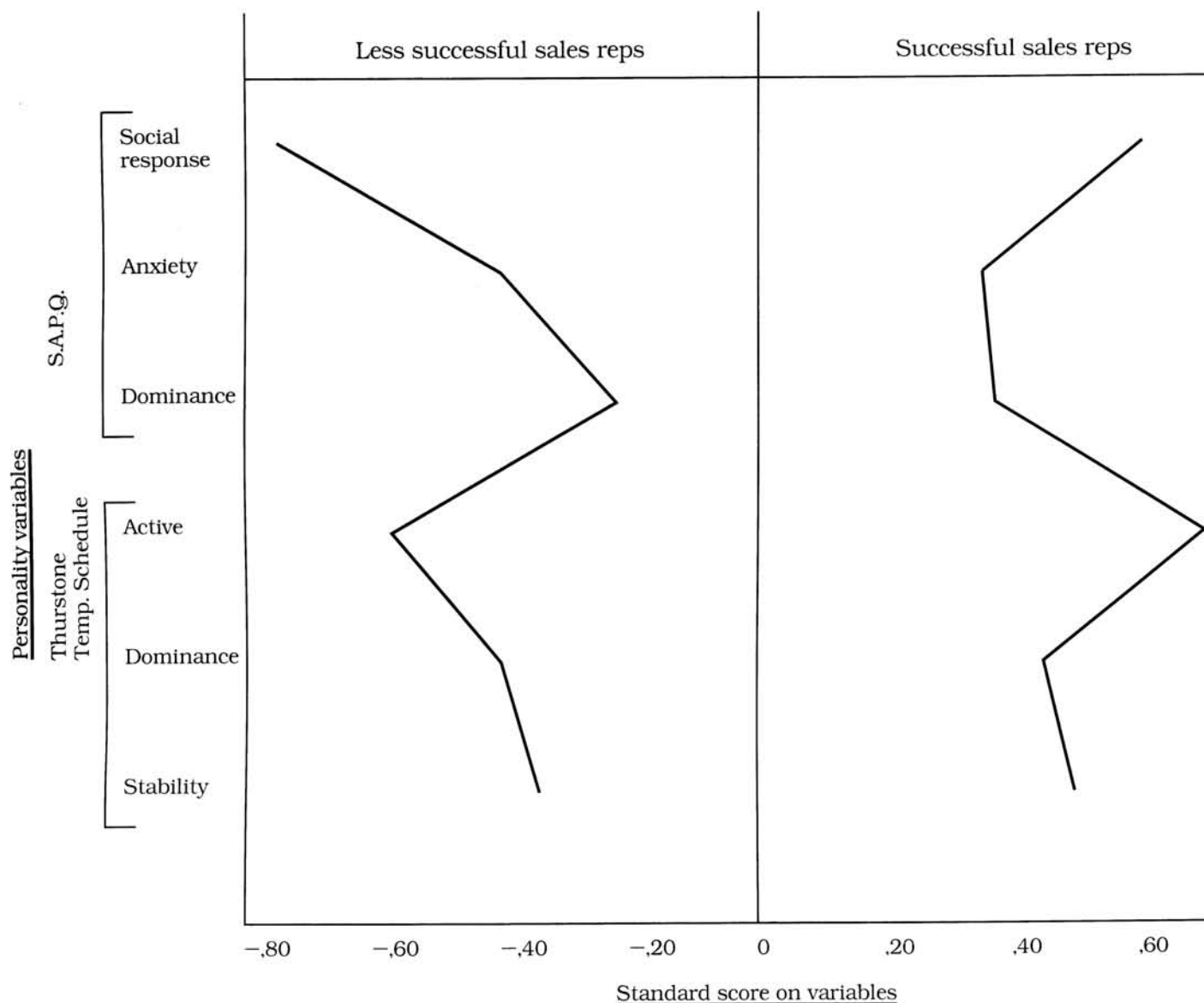


Figure 1. Comparison of the profiles of successful and less successful sales representatives

The above-mentioned differences can be graphically illustrated, as in Figure 1.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From the results it can be stated that successful and less successful sales representatives can be statistically differentiated in terms of personality profile. By implication this means that the potentially successful sales representative will possess a unique personality profile which will differentiate him/her from the potentially less successful counterpart. This phenomenon is of particular significance in the selection of sales representatives in that the potentially successful ones may be identified from amongst applicants and only those who meet the personality profile requirements would be considered for selection. Although this study focused only on personality as part of the customer-salesperson interaction it does provide evidence that personality factors cannot be ignored in studies of consumer behaviour in general and sales representatives in particular.

This investigation must, however, be seen as a pilot study and it is recommended that a more intensive follow-up study should be carried out, and that norm tables

should be calculated in order to facilitate the selection process.

It must be clearly stated that this investigation showed only that personality characteristics are important determinants in the selection of sales representatives. There will, without any doubt, also be other determinants which should be considered in the selection process. To be really successful in the selection of sales representatives a company would have to gradually build a comprehensive selection battery and evaluate that on a regular basis.

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