

# Sales Personnel Training – An Integrated Framework for Indian Brick-and-Mortar Retailers

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### ABSTRACT

In brick-and-mortar retailing, sales personnel play the most important and complex role whereby they are the ones who are connected to consumers directly on a real-time basis. Besides, to this complexity retailers in India find it difficult to recruit well-trained sales personnel who is an all-rounder. It is observed that majority of bricks-and-mortar retailers in India assume : (a) sales personnel in the store are required to assist consumers in finding the right product at the earliest; (b) consumers who walk into their stores have a clear understanding of their needs and based on their needs they enquire sales personnel in the store about a specific product/category/brand; (c) sales personnel attrition rate in stores is generally higher owing to lower pay scale; (d) product-specific training has to be given the highest priority; (e) designing a common training program relevant to all types of sales personnel is difficult, and most importantly, (f) existing training efforts have not yielded in any significant positive impact on the store profitability. Such assumptions and misconceptions have created a predisposition and mindset in sales personnel and sales organization, and they believe that they are delivering the best results. In this exhaustive study, we have attempted to design a new sales personnel training framework that attempts to integrate a majority of the elements such as training content, trainee, trainer, training time frame in addition to firm-level and consumer-level evaluation techniques. In this twelve months-long research work we have analyzed a select brick-and-mortar retailer's existing training framework, designed a new integrated sales personnel training framework, applied it to a select group of experimental stores to derive insights from the experimentation and check validity and reliability of the proposed framework. Results have demonstrated that more than 35 percent of the consumers repeat store visit rate could be determined by (a) store profitability that is a positive motivator to sales personnel to perform better; (b) walk-in conversion rate that is directly affected by the sales pitch of sales personnel which is directly affected by the continuous training efforts; (c) sales personnel monetary incentive earnings that are directly affected by their performance through improved learnings; and (d) sales personnel attrition rate that is a result of overall satisfaction of sales personnel.

**Keywords:** Brick-and-Mortar Retail, Sales Personnel, Salesperson, Retail Sales Training, Sales Personnel Development, Training, On-the-Job Training, Training the Trainer, Retail Education, Sales Personnel Training Framework.

### 1. INTRODUCTION :

The retail industry in India is one of the largest employment sectors. The Indian Government has created an exclusive department in the year 2015 by the name of 'Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship' to focus on empowering Indian youth with relevant skill sets through which they can be employable and productive. This exclusive department has organizations to focus on specific

skill development such as (i) 'Directorate General of Training (DGT)'; (ii) 'National Skill Development Agency (NSDA)'; (iii) 'National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)'; (iv) 'Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IEE)', and (v) 'Sector Skill Councils (SSC)'. Through these initiatives 'Retailer Association's Skill Council of India (RASCI)' has come into existence which is funded by the Government of India in partnership with 'Retailers Association of India (RAI)', Reliance Retail Ltd., Future Retail India Ltd., Shoppers Stop Ltd., Globus Stores Pvt Ltd., Infiniti Retail Ltd., and Cannought Plaza Restaurant Pvt Ltd which aims to function as an Apex body of skill development exclusive for the retail industry.

The majority of retail organizations in India have created an exclusive department comprising of training and development experts under the Human Resource Development function. This exclusive department engages with all the levels of employees in the Sales and Store Operations function to impart training in specific areas of learning and development comprising of both soft skills and product skills. Sometimes this department outsources the training and development programs to external agencies/consultants. Few retail organization has even collaborated with Educational Institutions which design customized courses to impart retail education to the select employees of the retail organization. Recently, another way is also existing wherein Educational Institutions are collaborating with retail organizations to actively impart practical retail education to their retail management students across diploma, graduate, and post-graduate levels.

It is imperative that the understanding of the role played by a particular product/category/brand might not be the same among consumers and sales personnel. What is important and of significant essence is that every sales personnel in the store is i) aware and familiar with each of these product/category/brand's roles concerning consumers explicit and implicit needs; ii) confident of product benefits; iii) aware of target consumer group; iv) able to communicate impressively to consumers; v) authentic in suggesting a right product/solution to consumers; vi) able to demonstrate emotional connect and empathy with the consumers; vii) cognizant of social engagement limitations with consumers, and most importantly viii) well trained to manage real-time adversities that are possible while interacting with consumers in the real-time. In absence of a framework that attempts to integrate all these basic requirements of a sales personnel, it is becoming difficult for Indian brick-and-mortar retailers to create all-rounder sales personnel in their stores.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW :

**Sales Personnel:** How sales personnel interact with consumers need to be customized to each consumer and this could be able to determine their success [1]. The customer orientation is said to happen when the sales personnel and consumer together practice the marketing concepts and just the interaction between sales personnel and consumer does not yield to this orientation, it needs to encompass most of the marketing concepts driven centrally by the company [2]. Two key constructs of consumer orientation are (i) sales personnel's tendency to ensure consumer needs are met and (ii) the level of sales personnel's enjoyment in doing so [3]. Few studies believe that what can lead to sales personnel enjoy the process of interaction with consumers and ultimately selling a product is their strong orientation to learning [4]. It also important to note, various studies have shown that 70% of the purchase decisions are made in-store by most of the customers [5]. The profitability is significantly derived from consumer loyalty which is strongly linked to a) internal service quality and b) satisfied and productive service employee. The service-profit chain model created in their work holds even after globalization, liberalization, and digitization of the retail market [6]. Understanding sales personnel behaviours has been and is one of the important fields in social science research. One of the important aspects of sales personnel behaviour that has a significant impact on consumer repeat visit intention and loyalty for a retail store is sales personnel's perception and predisposition about a consumer who he/she is attending to. The majority of sales personnel develop their mindsets to segment consumers into preferred consumers and non-preferred consumers and this mindset play an important role in the way the consumer will get treated by the sales personnel [7-9]. In the past, various indicators that can indicate a retail sale concerning the quality and level of sales personnel involved have been studied and analyzed by many researchers. Most important indicators were a) the amount and quality of time spent by the sales personnel with the consumer [10], b) variety of products/SKUs/models being showcased by the sales personnel to consumer [11], c) level of information being collected by the sales personnel

on consumer needs directly from the consumer [12], d) sales personnel's efforts to understand the consumer brand preference and showcasing products/SKUs/models concerning the preference [13], e) sales personnel's capability to explain the features of products showcased to consumers and their confidence level while explaining the differentiation among a variety of products showcased [14], and f) the range of products/SKUs/models showcased by the sales personnel concerning price and utility expected by the consumers [15]. Various sales personnel centric experimental research studies were carried by us. (i) In an experiment wherein by changing the sales personnel's performance measure from output-driven to input-driven measures, the input-driven measures were all helping the sales personnel to understand the role of each product; be it essential, non-essential, high-priced, low-priced and so on and indirectly these measures were pushing them to focus on just the consumer's needs, consumer's lifetime value rather all the time thinking about just one transaction [16]. (ii) In an experiment wherein we attempted to decentralize the discounting process by empowering sales personnel to decide on the type and level of discount to be offered to consumer found that, it is not just the discount level, type, duration, coverage, and advertising discount offer which is important to attract more consumers and increase their intent to purchase more, what is also very important is a) how does the sales personnel who is dealing with the consumer directly and has real-time insights about consumer's intent, needs and attitude towards a particular purchase activity communicate available discount offers with confidence, b) does he/she believes in a particular discount offer and c) can he/she convince the consumer about the benefits of discount offers which are on products that are not immediate purchase requirement of a consumer. This experiment in a way indicates that sales personnel need to be considered as the most important last-mile communication delivery personnel who has the capability of creating a positive perception about the retailer [17]. (iii) In an experiment wherein we implemented a need-based sales pitch technique, results were affirmative of the fact that the level and quality of interaction between sales personnel and consumers is important to understand the consumer life-stage which in turn helps the sales personnel to correctly identify the real-time need of the consumer and suggest relevant products to be purchased. This in a way raises questions about are the stores run with the optimal number of sales personnel all the time that too especially during peak sales hours [18]. All these findings are affirmative to the fact that the sales personnel's knowledge about the implicit and explicit needs while engaging with consumer in real-time significantly influences consumer's purchase decision directly and most importantly this engagement process also indirectly influence consumer's mindset on their long-term association with the retail store or retailer.

**Training:** One of the most researched sub-domain of organizational psychology is training. Many empirical and experimental studies were conducted by researchers that are concerned with ways in which a trainee's learning is maximized viz., a) distributive versus massed practice sessions [19]; b) part versus whole training [20]; c) knowledge of results [21], and d) the transfer of learning [22]. Later studies have focussed on a) organizational factors that can affect the training; b) how to identify the training needs of an employee; c) development of training methods (on-site and off-site), and d) ways to influence employees to apply their learning from training in the workplace [23]. The basis of a successful business strategy is shifting from financial capital to intellectual capital [24]. Even when the organization has identified the training needs of employees, next bigger strategic decision is to whether the training to be conducted by internal experts or it should be outsourced or to be a combination of both, what has been observed in developed countries is that the majority of employee training is outsourced [25-27] and if the training topic is general or common topic then outsourcing is more economical [28]. Informal training that is provided constantly by the supervisors and co-workers is significantly effective in comparison to formal training which is targeted at an on-job-training [29]. In one of the studies researchers have identified eight types of behaviours in sales personnel such as i) socializer; ii) aggressor; iii) narrator; iv) product focussed; v) storyteller; vi) consultant; vii) product closer, and viii) expert and most importantly they argue that the head of a sales organization must recognize these types to manage them efficiently [30]. Irrespective of whether a training conducted by an organization is relevant for the firm or it is just a general training that aims for the overall development of an employee, the organization must invest in training and development programs [31-35]. Studies have demonstrated that formal training has a positive impact on a) perceived performance of an organization; b) productivity of the employees and c) profitability of the organization [36-39]. In the summary majority of the research concerning training has focussed on a) organizational

perspectives versus employee perspectives; b) formal versus informal; c) in-house versus outsourced; d) methodology versus design; e) general topics versus specific topics; f) short-term versus long-term impacts; g) motivational versus objective outcomes; h) trainer versus trainee; i) continuous versus discrete, and j) return on training investment.

**The Need for this Study:** We were trying to find in the existing literature a framework that could integrate all the constructs of sales personnel learning and development that we would apply and evaluate if the framework can answer our key research questions in the Indian context. But we could not find a model/framework with which we can answer our research questions such as a) should we believe that the existing training can create all-rounder sales personnel; b) does the existing training and development attempts to address all the developmental needs of sales personnel; c) do sales personnel believe in formal training activities; d) are the existing training personnel have enough authority in evaluating the training outcomes, and most importantly e) are these existing training efforts input-driven or out-put driven. Thus, we decided to understand the existing training process and methodology of a brick-and-mortar retailer, analyze the available secondary data to verify the assumptions to create a new integrated sales personnel training framework to be implemented over a longer period to evaluate the implications of the new framework on the impact of sales personnel's overall development and store profitability.

### 3. OBJECTIVES :

Key objectives of this research were to (i) understand the training and development programs adopted by Indian brick-and-mortar retailers for sales personnel; (ii) understand the performance of these programs; (iii) understand existing training and development of the retailer selected for the study; (iv) analyze recommendations from previous research relevant in the Indian context; (v) design and propose an integrated sales personnel training framework for Indian brick-and-mortar retailers; (vi) apply the proposed framework on a select Indian retailer and vii) draw insights from the real-time experiment with recommendations.

### 4. METHODOLOGY :

**Secondary Research:** Intense and in-depth analysis of data available in the public domain was carried to collect data relating to various aspects of sales personnel training and development in India through company websites, company annual financial reports, Government database, trade, and business journals. Research works relating to Indian retailing was surveyed extensively to collect insights, recommendations, and frameworks.

**Quantitative Primary Research:** We decided to choose a complex retailing vertical to study and design an integrated training framework and hence designing a training framework to address a complex retailing vertical can help to generalize the framework to other retailing verticals or formats. In the first stage, one of the organized baby care brick-and-mortar retailers in India was selected who is having stores all over India across a) high street stores; b) mall stores; c) institutional stores; d) tier 1, 2 and 3 cities; offering multiple-categories and multiple-brands serving different consumer life-stage needs at mid to high price positioning and catering to pregnant women; new moms; babies; infants and kids up to 8 years. In the second stage, 30 percent of the stores were selected through systematic random sampling to undergo experimentation wherein the proposed sales personnel training framework was applied for twelve months. In the third stage, all the data was collected before experimentation from all the stores belonging to the control and experimental group. The fourth stage was to collect post-test data from the control and experimental group of stores and in the last stage the collected data from pre and post-tests periods were subjected to various statistical analyses using SPSS software tools and inferences were drawn.

**Qualitative Primary Research:** An open-ended direct interview was conducted with employees selected through convenience sampling representing different departments/functions viz., strategy management, category management, marketing management, communication management, finance management, information technology management, sales management, stores operation along with store sales personnel to understand their perspective and attitude towards existing training proposition and its implications on the overall sales personnel development and retailing performance.

## 5. PROPOSED SALES PERSONNEL TRAINING FRAMEWORK :

Before we design a new training framework or proposition, we thought, it would be ideal to first understand the existing training structure or design of the select retailer and evaluate if the same is efficient in delivering a) overall development of sales personnel; b) differentiation among competitors; c) consistent growth in revenue; d) sustainable store profits and most importantly d) highest level of consumer orientation. Along with taking clues from the direct interviews of employees representing all the departments and functions, we have analyzed the existing sales data, consumer store visit repeat frequency, organizational hierarchy, sales organization hierarchy, store management hierarchy, and key business objectives through which we have assessed the attitudes of the entire organization towards existing training against the secondary data.

**Existing Training Structure:** Table 1 depicts the existing training proposition of the retailer selected for the research study. One can observe that this shows a classical and traditional training proposition of a retailer wherein most of the training time is allotted to product-specific topics. It is perfectly fine not to invent new training propositions but at the same time, the existing training proposition seriously ignores i) categorization of employees in the sales organization based on their experience in the organization, their total experience, hierarchy, role, education level, and skill level; ii) the importance of consumer orientation skill topics, and iii) post-training evaluation systems. Even more serious was the attitude of the senior management team wherein most of the training activities in the organization were just a ‘tick-in-the-box’ tasks. The majority of existing training proposition being derived from standard and general training propositions which are followed by competitors and would lead all the personnel in the organization also deliver results which are just average or below average thereby seriously failing to deliver overall development of personnel and sustainable store profit. A majority of the employee roles were defined based on general classification and categorization of products and they were all significantly skewed in favour of products. For instance; i) category management team had category managers for specific product categories wherein each of these category managers were concerned about their category profitability level irrespective of its positive or negative impact on the consumer’s overall life-time value and satisfaction towards the store thereby they were only focussed on downloading loads of product-specific information on to sales personnel in the name of training; ii) marketing team had managers for specific category grouped together and majority of the promotions were designed and communicated to consumers in isolation thereby making them only focus on imparting communication skills to sales personnel for a specific product or product line through training; iii) sales personnel in the store were allocated specific product categories owing to which the sales pitch to consumers was in silos and the store as a whole could never focus on consumers’ lifetime value, consumers’ complete needs across different product categories, and most importantly the stores failed to create positive perceptions in consumer’s mind about the store as one-stop-solution for all their life-stage needs. In summary, none of the training programs were aimed at developing all-rounder sales personnel for the store who is capable of handling all the life-stage needs of a single consumer across products/categories/brands.

**Table 1:** Existing training proposition of the select retailer.

Topic	Training			Trainee
	Frequency	Place	Trainer	
Induction	Once	Store	L&D (Internal)	New Sales Personnel; Store Managers
Induction	Once	Regional Office	L&D (Internal)	New Area Managers; Regional Managers
Induction	Once	Central Office	L&D (Internal)	New Regional Managers; National Sales Manager
Product-Specific	Monthly	Store	L&D (Internal)	New and Existing Sales Personnel; Store, Area, and Regional Managers
Role Plays	Quarterly	Store	L&D (External)	New and Existing Sales Personnel; Store Managers; Area Managers
Communication Skills	Half Yearly	Store	L&D (External)	New and Existing Sales Personnel; Store Managers; Area Managers
Motivational	Yearly	Off-Site	L&D (External)	Entire Sales Organization and a few select Sales Personnel

*L&D = Department of Learning and Development*

The most important objective of sales personnel training is to continuously impart new knowledge, new sales pitch techniques, new engagement tactics, and new walk-in conversion skills all of which should lead to the highest level of sales personnel consumer orientation, a higher number of satisfied consumers and a higher rate of consumers repeat store visits. But the existing training proposition has

completely ignored the overall development of sales personnel concerning consumer orientation. Most of the employees, employee roles, products, processes, performance indicators, promotions, product display layouts, control systems, planning cycles in the store were product or category-specific. As a result, the select retailer was a) too much dependent on a few all-rounder sales personnel; b) unable to create many all-rounder sales personnel; c) clueless of how best to utilize the expertise of a few all-rounder sales personnel in the system to replicate; d) facing higher attrition level in the stores as most of the rewards were grabbed by only a few all-rounder sales personnel; e) unable to retain a majority of consumers; f) unable to witness consistent growth in revenue; g) unable to turn the majority of stores to deliver profit, and most importantly h) failing to gain any strategic and competitive advantage over other organized and unorganized retailers in the catchment.

**Proposed Training Framework:** During our qualitative primary research stage, we have noticed that a majority of sales personnel were carrying some strong beliefs concerning training and development such as a) Store Manager has a better understanding of our capabilities and our skill-gap which makes it easier for him/her to train us daily using real-time case-based training methodology; b) Store Manager has a clear understanding of short-term and long-term deliverables from us; c) Managers above the Store Manager help us learn skills which are of higher standards that are not found in our Store Manager, and most importantly c) training conducted by L&D team and external agencies once in a while are interesting but they seriously lack in understanding the ground-level realities and day-to-day issues. This brings us to the point that trainer is also an important element of a training proposition. Based on all these insights in addition to analyzing secondary company data, we decided to create a framework which could integrate all the possible elements and sub-elements of sales personnel training objective. The new framework is essentially driven by identification, categorization, and mapping of all the elements and sub-elements of a training proposition.

**Training Content Categorization:** Based on different types of skills required to develop an all-rounder sales personnel we have categorized skills into a) product skills, b) emotional skills, c) social skills, and d) adversity skills.

**Trainer Categorization:** Inevitably, in addition to having specific skill sets to train, the trainer also needs to have a certain authority level with which he/she can ensure that the expected outcomes of the training are owned by the trainer and instructions are obeyed by the trainees. Based on this rule, we have categorized trainers into a) authoritative trainers by hierarchy such as A1-Store Manager, A2-Area Manager, A3-Regional Manager, and A4-National Sales Manager b) non-authoritative trainers such as N1-Internal L&D Team and N2-External Trainer.

**Training Time-Frame Categorization:** Though training is a continuous improvement process, one has to be cognizant of the fact that every training has to have a pre-determined time frame. We have categorized training time-frame by frequency such as a) daily, b) weekly, c) monthly, d) quarterly, e) half-yearly, and f) yearly.

**Training Evaluation Categorization:** Unless organization evaluates the outcome of every training activity irrespective of training content, trainee, trainer, and training time-frame it is difficult to identify economically viable training programs that can be replicated on a long-term basis. To enable organizations to evaluate outcomes of every training program we have categorized evaluation into a) firm-level audits and b) consumer-level audits.

Frameworks 1e to 1adepicts the proposed mapping of different types of trainers to train different levels of personnel in the entire sales organization based on the training need (content and time-frame).

Trainee		National Sales Manager (A4)			
<i>Trainer</i>		<b>Training Content</b>			
		Product Skills	Emotional Skills	Social Skills	Adersity Skills
<b>Training Time-Frame</b>	Quarterly	<i>N1</i>	<i>N1</i>	<i>N1</i>	<i>N1</i>
	Half -Yearly	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>
	Yearly	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>

**Framework 1e:** Integrated training framework for National Sales Manager

Trainee		Regional Manager (A3)			
<i>Trainer</i>		<b>Training Content</b>			
		Product Skills	Emotional Skills	Social Skills	Adersity Skills
<b>Training Time-Frame</b>	Monthly	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>
	Quarterly	<i>A4</i>	<i>N1</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>A4</i>
	Half -Yearly	<i>A4</i>	<i>N1</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>A4</i>
	Yearly	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>

**Framework 1d:** Integrated training framework for Regional Sales Managers

Trainee		Area Manager (A2)			
<i>Trainer</i>		<b>Training Content</b>			
		Product Skills	Emotional Skills	Social Skills	Adersity Skills
<b>Training Time-Frame</b>	Monthly	<i>A3</i>	<i>A3</i>	<i>A3</i>	<i>A3</i>
	Quarterly	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>
	Half -Yearly	<i>A4</i>	<i>N1</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>A4</i>
	Yearly	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>

**Framework 1c:** Integrated training framework for Area Sales Managers

Trainee		Store Manager (A1)			
<i>Trainer</i>		<b>Training Content</b>			
		Product Skills	Emotional Skills	Social Skills	Adersity Skills
<b>Training Time-Frame</b>	Weekly	<i>A2</i>	<i>A2</i>	<i>A2</i>	<i>A2</i>
	Monthly	<i>A3</i>	<i>A3</i>	<i>A3</i>	<i>A3</i>
	Quarterly	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>
	Half -Yearly	<i>A4</i>	<i>N1</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>A4</i>
	Yearly	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>

**Framework 1b:** Integrated training framework for Store Managers



Trainee		Sales Personnel			
Trainer		Training Content			
		Product Skills	Emotional Skills	Social Skills	Adersity Skills
Training Time-Frame	Daily	<i>A1</i>	<i>A1</i>	<i>A1</i>	<i>A1</i>
	Weekly	<i>A2</i>	<i>A2</i>	<i>A2</i>	<i>A2</i>
	Monthly	<i>A3</i>	<i>A3</i>	<i>A3</i>	<i>A3</i>
	Quarterly	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>	<i>A4</i>
	Half -Yearly	<i>A4</i>	<i>N1</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>A4</i>
	Yearly	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>	<i>N2</i>

**Framework 1a:** Integrated training framework for Sales Personnel

## 6. EXECUTING THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK :

Glaringly we have observed that the whole system in the retail organization was trying to improve sales personnel skills and performance thereby while doing so they have completely ignored other personnel in the sales organization assuming they are well educated and have all the skills required for the sales management. This is the key reason why we have designed a series of training frameworks all of which aim to develop all-rounder sales personnel in the sales organization. If a retail organization aims to create as many as possible all-rounder sales personnel who shall deliver better performance and profitable stores, it is inevitable for them to also align the entire sales organization across all levels in the hierarchy without bypassing their authority. How we have shown each of these frameworks also indicates the proposed flow (top level to bottom level) of training and development activities in the organization. To reach the final goal of creating all-rounder sales personnel one has to follow this flow else the expected results of the proposed integrated training framework shall not be significant. It is also recommended that the internal L&D team must always look for internal experts, especially for product-specific skill-related training activities. Finally, and most importantly continual unbiased evaluation of this training is essential. To ensure an unbiased evaluation we propose two techniques. The first one is firm-level audits which simply should measure the individual sales personnel performance using a) actual sales data, b) improvement in the sales, c) month-on-month growth, and d) amount of monetary incentives earned. All these measures are indicators of development in the overall performance of sales personnel and shall not give any indication of improvements in behavioral development. The second one is consumer-level audits which ensures that the behavioral improvements in sales personnel are measured. Mystery consumer shopping technique is recommended to conduct consumer-level audits wherein the mystery shoppers shall measure individual sales personnel across pre-defined parameters such as a) storekeeping, b) consumer interaction, c) grooming, d) salesmanship, and e) final transactional activities.

## 7. TESTING OF PROPOSED SALES PERSONNEL TRAINING FRAMEWORK :

We were firm in our approach that, the proposed training framework has to be tested in a retail set up before we recommend the same to brick-and-mortar retailers. But it was not that easy merely because of the vast scope of the experiment. Unlike other experiments wherein the treatment is limited to few concepts, components or variables this experiment required us to cover practically almost all the elements of the training framework which do require longer duration for preparations before testing, longer duration before the beginning of extracting the results and a longer period for the

experimentation itself to ensure findings and insights are derived holistically. The biggest challenge of testing the new training framework was the time taken to make attitudinal changes in the employees of the select retailer across all departments and functions. Their attitude towards the training framework was significantly negative towards basic principles, concepts, proposition, and the overall theory of the new training framework which is skewed to the demand-side. Once we have completed the twelve months' long treatment across all the elements recommended in the proposed training framework, we took the final reading of resultant data that was a moving average of six months post the treatment to further analyze, evaluate, and derive insights.

### 8. KEY FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS :

We have recorded results of data analysis independently for empirical, statistical, and qualitative aspects as detailed below to ensure that we take an unbiased look at each of these findings before we consolidate all the results to conclude.

**Empirical Analysis:** As part of the empirical analysis we have looked at the data from pre-test and post-test across control and experimental group of stores to understand the impact of a new integrated training framework in changing firm-level measurables such as a) overall store profitability; b) consumers store visit repeat rate; c) sales personnel monetary incentive earning, d) sales personnel attrition rate and consumer-level measurable that is e) the mystery audit score.

Using pre-test post-test real treatment effect formula, we have found that the real treatment effect has shown a) 877.19 percent improvement in the overall store profitability; b) 50.95 percent improvement in the consumers repeat store visit rate; c) 125.59 percent improvement in sales personnel monetary incentive earning, and d) 55.97 percent reduction in the sales personnel attrition rate in the experimental group of stores in comparison to control group of stores as shown in table 2.

**Table 2:** Pre-test post-test real treatment effect across key factors in the experimental group as a percentage change over their pre-test period

Factors	Post-Test Experimental Group
Average MRP	-0.95%
Average Selling Price	-0.64%
Average Earning Value	1.23%
Average Basket Size	-0.79%
Average Transaction Value	-1.81%
Discount per cent	-2.82%
Quantity per square foot	9.43%
Revenue per square foot	7.60%
Earning per square foot	9.31%
<b>Store profit per square foot</b>	<b>877.19%</b>
<b>Repeat Consumer Rate</b>	<b>50.95%</b>
<b>Sales Personnel Incentive Value</b>	<b>125.59%</b>
<b>Sales Personnel Attrition Rate</b>	<b>-55.97%</b>
<b>Consumer-Level Audit Score</b>	<b>Nil</b>

**Table 3:** Percentage variance in the experimental group over the control group during pre and post-test periods

Factors	Pre-Test Experimental Group	Post-Test Experimental Group
Average MRP	-5.6%	-6.5%
Average Selling Price	-5.0%	-5.6%
Average Earning Value	65.7%	67.1%
Average Basket Size	-11.3%	-12.0%
Average Transaction Value	-15.5%	-16.9%
Discount per cent	-0.2%	-2.9%
Quantity per square foot	14.1%	22.6%
Revenue per square foot	10.5%	17.2%
Earning per square foot	8.8%	16.6%
<b>Store profit per square foot</b>	<b>-82.4%</b>	<b>1985.3%</b>
<b>Repeat Consumer Rate</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>73.5%</b>
<b>Sales Personnel Incentive Value</b>	<b>-0.9%</b>	<b>140.8%</b>
<b>Sales Personnel Attrition Rate</b>	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>-54.9%</b>
<b>Consumer-Level Audit Score</b>	<b>Nil</b>	<b>44.4%</b>

Table 3 demonstrates the variance in key factors of the experimental group of stores over the control group of stores during pre and post-test periods. One can observe that during the pre-test period in most of the firm-level measures which could indicate the impact of training, the experimental group of stores was inferior in comparison with the control group of stores. Whereas after the treatment that is implementing the new integrated training framework all the firm-level measures of the experimental group of stores have shown significant improvement over the control group of stores in addition to a significant improvement in the consumer-level measure that is a mystery audit score.

Table 4 demonstrates the variance in key factors of the experimental and control group of stores during the post-test period over their pre-test period. Results indicate that the improvement in all the firm-level measurements is significant in the experimental group of stores in comparison to the control group of stores. In comparison with pre-test the experimental group of stores has shown a) 14.116 times growth in the overall store profit; b) 1.537 times growth in the consumers repeat store visit rate; c) 2.133 times growth in the sales personnel monetary incentive earning, and e) 0.449 times deterioration in the sales personnel attrition rate. Thus, we conclude that the new integrated training framework is valid empirically as demonstrated in tables 1, 2, 3, and 4.

**Table 4:** Percentage variance in the experimental and control group over their post-test periods

Factors	Post-Test Control Group	Post-Test Experimental Group
Average MRP	0.0%	-1.0%
Average Selling Price	-0.1%	-0.7%
Average Earning Value	0.9%	1.8%
Average Basket Size	0.1%	-0.6%
Average Transaction Value	0.5%	-1.2%
Discount per cent	1.6%	-1.2%
Quantity per square foot	10.0%	18.2%
Revenue per square foot	9.9%	16.5%
Earning per square foot	13.6%	21.8%
<b>Store profit per square foot</b>	<b>111.9%</b>	<b>1511.6%</b>
<b>Repeat Consumer Rate</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>53.7%</b>
<b>Sales Personnel Incentive Value</b>	<b>-12.2%</b>	<b>113.3%</b>
<b>Sales Personnel Attrition Rate</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>-55.1%</b>

**Statistical Analysis:** As part of statistical analysis we have looked at the data from pre-test and post-test across control and experimental group of stores to understand the impact of a new integrated training framework in indicating the association of independent variables such as a) overall store profitability; B) sales personnel monetary incentive earning, and c) sales personnel attrition rate with the dependent variable that is consumers store visit repeat rate.

Table 5 indicates that in the experimental group of stores, about 37 percent of the consumer store visit repeat rate is demonstrated by the consolidated impact of independent variables such as a) store profitability that is a positive motivator to sales personnel to perform better; b) walk-in conversion rate that is directly affected by the sales pitch of sales personnel which is directly affected by the continuous training efforts; c) sales personnel monetary incentive earnings that are directly affected by their performance, and d) sales personnel attrition rate that is a result of overall satisfaction of sales personnel. Whereas, in the control group of stores, in the absence of an integrated training framework and the presence of existing training structure the determination is about 14 percent which is not as significant as that of the experimental group of stores and is weaker by 62.67 percent. Thus, we conclude that the new integrated training framework is valid statistically as demonstrated in tables 5 and 4.

**Table 5:** Correlation, determination, regression, and significance level between key variables independently and the resultant consumer store repeat visit rate

Group	Model	Predictors	Dependent Variable	R	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F Change	ANOVA Sig.
Experimental	1	Store Profitability	Consumer Store Visit Repeat Rate	0.616	0.367	29.982	0.000
		Walk-Ins Conversion Rate					
		Sales Personnel Monetary Incentive					
		Sales Personnel Attrition Rate					
Control	1	Store Profitability	Consumer Store Visit Repeat Rate	0.378	0.137	26.644	0.000
		Walk-Ins Conversion Rate					
		Sales Personnel Monetary Incentive					
		Sales Personnel Attrition Rate					

**Qualitative Analysis:** As far as qualitative findings are concerned an open-ended interview was conducted with select (convenience) employees across all the departments/functions of the central team, sales organization, and store sales personnel of the experimental group of stores. A majority of these employees have agreed that though it was very hard to believe and incorporate the basic principles of a new training framework the significantly favourable results are undeniable. The post-test results are encouraging, and they have eroded all the misconceptions and beliefs they had before experimenting. One of the key results which were glaringly visible to them was, despite higher sales personnel incentives being paid stores in the experimental group have shown significant improvement in the overall profitability by multi-fold and interestingly all the loss-making stores also have turned to profitable stores. Most importantly, the entire sales organization started owning the expected outcomes of all the training efforts.

## 9. CONCLUSION :

Despite sales personnel having all the required skills, inevitably they have to face consumers with varied mindsets in real-time which makes it very important for a retail organization to continuously strive for training them to efficiently manage different consumers. The results of the experiment indicate that there is a significant association between sales personnel's overall performance (be it for their profit or the store profit) and the training. It is not as that easy simply because it is not just about the training content, it is a rational mixture of training content, trainer, trainee, training time-frame, and most importantly the unbiased evaluation of each training effort concerning the expected outcomes. Any attempt to train sales personnel directly by the L&D personnel (both internal and external) would just be an activity or a tick-in-the-box as a majority of sales personnel and managers in the sales

organization refrain from owing the expected deliverables of such training efforts. Undoubtedly a majority of retailers globally agree that higher the consumer repeat visit rate to stores, higher the probability of store profitability, and most importantly better unit of economics across the business. But retailers need to be cognizant of the fact that other than having the most competitive “4P’s” proposition the only person who makes a big difference in converting all the walk-ins to satisfied consumers of a brick-and-mortar store is the sales personnel. The new training framework attempts to integrate a majority of elements of training proposition and takes into consideration the complexity of integrating all the elements in a way it is easy and simple to execute at the ground-level. When we applied the proposed integrated training framework for over twelve months’ at 30 percent stores of a select retailer, results demonstrate that these stores which have gone through the treatment in addition to few of them turning profitable for the first time all the stores delivered the highest ever revenue, profit, witnessed the highest number of consumers visiting these stores more often in addition to significantly reducing sales personnel attrition rate by 55 percent and improving sales personnel monetary incentive earning by 141 percent thereby providing validity and reliability of the proposed new integrated sales personnel training framework for brick-and-mortar retailing in the field.

#### **10. SUGGESTIONS TO BRICK-AND-MORTAR RETAILERS :**

Brick-and-mortar retailers need to identify every other retailer's key business goal and their target consumers which could have compelled them to have a particular training framework or design whether they are organized, semi-organized, or unorganized. Few may be trying to use training programs to attract new employees, few may be trying to show that there is a constant engagement between the sales organization and the L&D team, few may be doing this as one of the key activities insisted by their investors, few may be conducting certain training programs repeatedly without having analyzed the expected outcomes of previous ones and most importantly few may be measuring the expected deliverables of a training program using revenue generated by a particular sales personnel as the key indicator of training performance and so on. What is very important is the key business goal of your retailing format, your target consumer group, and target consumer group’s attitude towards your sales personnel in addition to basic “4P’s” proposition of the store. Retailers need to know that the perspective towards the store’s salesperson might not be the same between yourselves and your consumers, with few consumers it may be the same, and with others, it may not be the case. Finally, we would like to bring to retailers attention that, any modifications whether small or big to existing training structure or design shall not be a short term exercise and shall not yield favourable results without allowing the modifications suggested in the proposed integrated sales personnel training framework to settle over a while and besides what is of utmost importance is the level of acceptance and adaptation among all the stakeholders of the retailing organization. To ensure a higher level of acceptance and adaptation across the retailing organization, retailers along with modifying the training framework must also always modify the key responsibility areas (KRA) and key performance indicators (KPI) of all the stakeholders concerning expected outcomes of the modifications in the training framework.

#### **11. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH :**

The main limitation of this research work is the coverage of various stakeholders viz., consumers, retail employees, sales organization structure, L&D structure, “4P’s” proposition, and retailer in experimenting with the new framework. This might limit the generalizability of the research findings to other sets of brick-and-mortar retailers, consumers, and stakeholders. The second limitation would be the empirical validation is restricted to one retail format i.e., multi-brand and multi-category organized bricks-and-mortar baby care stores in India and hence the generalizability of the findings and suggestions to other retailing formats. The third limitation would be our ability to carry out true experimental design, at best we were able to carry out a pre-test post-test control group experimental design. However, it provides significant inputs regarding the ways to utilize these findings as all the findings have been derived from an experiment spread over twelve months.

#### **12. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH :**

We recommended that the proposed integrated sales personnel training framework be experimented by researchers and finetune the framework if required for different retailing formats and verticals. Based on the key business objectives and their target consumer group, brick-and-mortar organized retailers can implement the proposed framework at their select stores and finetune the same based on real-time findings which can then be implemented across the entire chain of their stores.

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