

Innovative Methods of Teaching in the Sales Education:

Case Study Analysis of a Role Play

by

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Abstract

Simulation and role play are teaching methods that allow students to speak in class in scenarios related to the course content and to practice the newly acquired knowledge and skills. This is to recreate a classroom environment similar to the environment in which they will work at the end of their training.

These teaching methods are important ways to make the students more active and motivated focusing on the development of the professional competence, on the meaning given to action. Through these activities, the students are called to gradually develop the tools that organize their knowledge and improve their skills.

The objective of the case study is to show through a theoretical background and a practical case the importance of the Role play as an innovative teaching method in the development of sales force students' attitudes and skills.

Key Words: Sales education, sales talk, Workshops Simulation, Role Play, Questioning techniques, Objections, Communication, Sequence Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The role play is an important component in many forms of simulation practices. A solid understanding of the methodological aspects of the role play facilitates the goal-oriented commitment to education, training and research. In this article we describe the way in which role-play is given in a specific simulative situation. We describe a case study from the area of skills education, which shows that the introduction of role-playing elements may increase the perceived realism.

The students should be able, at the end of the semester, master and use the techniques of a sales talk in the B2B area.

THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of the course: is to provide the students a comprehensive theoretical and practical background. The theoretical aspects are related to the basics of the psychological theories. Furthermore, the characteristics of the sales phases are theoretically discussed. The students have to work in small groups many case studies, such as potential customer objections and the possible seller answers. The different sales phases are performed in role-playing simulation. In this purpose, the students are looking to start the semester with a technical product choice that can be sold

in the B2B area. In fact, they have to develop the product's features, advantages and benefits and create competition studies. It should be noted at this point that the role plays are complicated by the buyer with many instructions. In addition to the practical implementation of role-playing simulations, the students are given the opportunity to accompany a sales representative for technical products as an experience in the job of a salesperson in reality. They also need to simulate 5 purchases for requiring explanation in shops to find out how the seller performs the various phases of the sales conversation. The interest is to evaluate if the seller makes an effective needs analysis and if the "customer" (our students) does not feel well advised at the end of the conversation. In addition, the students have to operate in a company for two four hours phone-prospecting in order to become familiar with the telephone calling and to be able to answer to the objections on the phone (killer phrases) appropriately.

Finally, this concept will provide an effective education as a salesman for technical products.

The role play: The role play behavior is reflected and practiced in different social situations. Hoffmann, B. and Langefeld, U., (1998), defined the role play as "*a kind of preparation for the reality in "acting-as-if" or an attempt to put themselves in the role of others*".

The role play has different intentions:

- Adaptation to realities and behavior patterns.
- Breaking conventional role behavior.

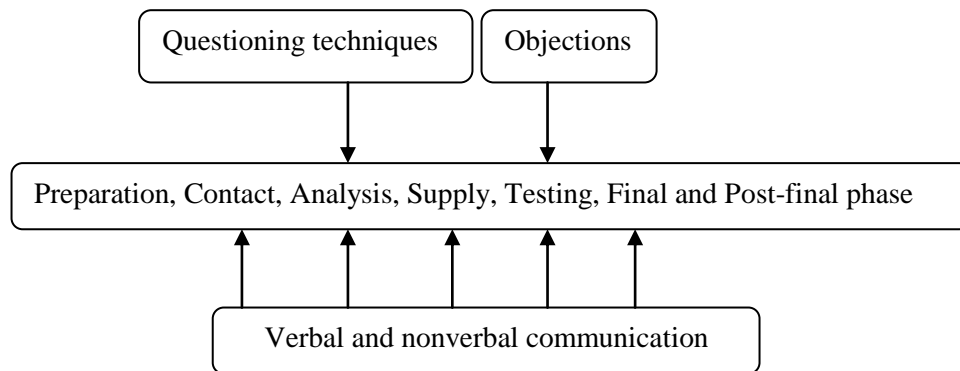
A characteristic feature of the role play is the fact that insights into personal behaviors and their changes are in the foreground. Accordingly, role playing can be used in different phases.

The sales talk: The sales talk can be divided into different phases. Each phase should be fully completed before the new begins. The phases are divided into: preparation, contact, analysis, supply, testing and final and post-final phase.

The following content give an overview of the practical case.

Figure 1

The Sales Talk Process



- Preparation: The following steps must be taken: analysis of the customer database, collect of information, definition of objectives, and contact by telephone, compilation of documents and anticipating objections.

- The contact Phase: Contacting the customer has two forms: phone contact and customer visit. To conduct a successful first sales contact, the salesperson has to follow this guide: Having interest in the interlocutor, willingness to engage in other views, trying to understand the customer and demonstrating positive attitude towards conversation.

- The analysis phase: At this stage, it is essential to note that a successful seller must be able to listen in order to identify the real needs of the customer so that he can make an adequate offer. The salesperson has to be a solution-oriented and not product-oriented. Besides, he has to master the different questioning techniques, both in form (open and closed questions) and in content (information questions, rhetorical questions and result questions).

- The supply phase: The analysis phase must be completed. The seller needs to know what expects the customer from the product. Each statement should be supported with arguments and benefits and must be explained (such as larger memory, long lasting battery,

powerful processor...). At last, the benefits offered by the product(s) must meet the need(s).

- The testing phase: At this stage the objections are taking place. A good seller must anticipate the objections as a prevention of the consequences. As preventive, and not defensive, solutions to the customer objections, the salesperson has to treat every objection immediately and never contradict. Then he has, also, to convert the objections in matters. They will be easier to treat. As an alternative method, the *plus- minus* method is recommended. In fact, it is admitting the obvious disadvantages and moving on to the next positive point.

- Final and post-final phase: When finishing a sales talk with the buyer, the seller must make specific arrangements, such as a product test, internal reconciliations, group presentation, training, sales conclusion. It is important that the seller recognizes the completing signals and dominates the contracting techniques. In a last step, the seller has to reaffirm the positive buying decision by completing together the purchase agreement and recommending the services that form the pack product.

We could not finish our theoretical background without noting that the customer is already sensitive to information. All information must therefore be prepared so that the customer can understand

them. It is exactly here where the verbal and no verbal communication plays a fairly important role.

PRACTICAL CASE

Who? This class experience is based on a simulation concept. The purpose is the integration of the participants, on concrete sales situations through individualization. Here, students get the opportunity to develop role-plays for training purposes on B2B sales talk. The participants are the High School of Karlsruhe's students from the 7th semester in a sales technics' course.

How? Workshops simulated with an industry office based on the followed topics: exchanges, formulation exercises, role-plays, practical exercises with video equipment (computer equipped with a camera and a microphone).

In order to give real effect to the conversation, every buyer (student) must follow many instructions in his interview with the seller student, such as price objection, incorrect features; product is not as expected, etc. Moreover, to avoid arbitrariness, some evaluation criteria should be established before the start of the activity and after the role play, for example we asked the buyer (our student) : " if that were the case you would buy?", and the seller (our student) and the rest of the class:"do you have any

comment?". The assessment, the self-assessment and the clarification of criteria related to objectives will also help the teacher in his assessment and the return on the activity. Some evaluation methods may allow us to situate the student in their learning.

How Long? This approach of teaching in sales education is shared by 14 groups of 2 students during 4 months. Each role play takes approximately 5 minutes.

Sequence Analysis: In order to ensure an effective case analysis, we have selected the video that we consider the most illustrative and the most significant.

- Customer complains about the late coming of the seller.
- Seller answers that the traffic was the reason.
- Customer complains that the seller has not called ahead.

The seller wants to sit.

- Customer offers him a place.
- Customer: the offer does not suit me. The last salesperson offered a wrong demonstration example color (0'58'').

- Seller asks what would not be exactly right.

The Customer shows dissatisfaction. The Seller remains calm, sitting at the table, but only on the front seat (escape position). The pattern is in the center of the table, prompting the customer to approach again

- Customer wants a powerful phone camera. The price is always away from his wishes (1'18'').

- The seller takes notes and answers to the customer objections. He explains the price differences and shows off the different services.

The seller retains the same sitting position.

- Customer replies that he would not assume that the Smartphone would go immediately broken.

- The seller: It depends to the maintenance.

- The customer explains again that he needs a reliable cell phone.

The seller looks - when he speaks - too often down and holds no eye contact with customers. The customer moves.

- The customer adds again that he would like that in the future the current salesperson comes and not another person (3'22'').

- The seller summarizes the requirements of the clients.
- The customer says that otherwise the offer would suit him.
- The seller summarizes the possibilities and announces a new offer, with about the same price.

Summary: The customer was very upset. Nevertheless, the seller remains calm and discusses the reasoning to convince the customer. He remains at the table, even if his chair is moved away. It lacks the seller to make eye contact with the customer. Despite the intense criticism of the customer, the seller manages to offer a new offer according the same attributes and the same price. The criticism of the high price is now exceeded. The seller, however, failed to agree on another appointment with the client to discuss the offer proposed. Overall, the chances are good that the customer buys. (It has also been confirmed by the customer so).

FURTHER SALES EDUCATION SKILLS IN PRACTICE

Acquisition by telephone in a professional call center:

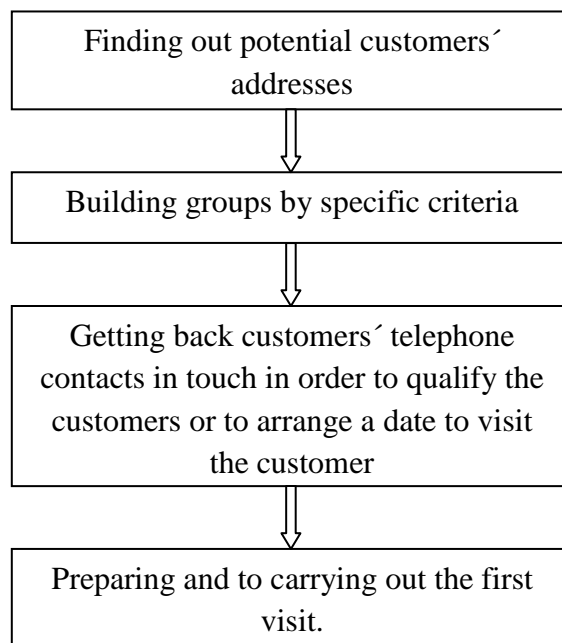
The students may conduct, within the lecture and in a professional call center, telephone conversations in the form of cold calling conversations for the pre-qualification of customer contacts. The target is to generate leads for the company which is supporting us.

The objective is to deepen the learned theoretical foundations and apply it into practice. The killer statements and the possible answers have been already developed in the lecture.

This should help the students to provide the smallest possible attack surface and not to get rid quickly.

Figure 2

Acquisition by Telephone



Testimonials:

Students:

“For us, as students, were primarily learning and gaining experiences in the focus. For the first time we had the opportunity to apply the learned contents of the lecture “sales and negotiation skills” in the practice and gain experiences in the sales via telephone”.

Partner:

“This combination offers the students the opportunity to conduct acquisition by telephone calls with real customers and to qualify potential customers”.

Accompaniment of a sales representative

In addition to the lecture sales and negotiation skills, the students are given the opportunity to gain practical experience. Our partners offer our students the opportunity to accompany a sales representative in a client meeting. This accompaniment will offer to Students the opportunity to see closely the daily work of a sales representative.

To learn about our different partners, the representatives of these companies are invited to the lecture sales and negotiation skills, in order to present their companies and their own sales channels.

The students will analyze how both the customer and the sales representative themselves behave in the sales talk. The experiences and the impressions collected by the students during this ride should help them to expect and to imagine their career, if they want to take a job as a sales representative after the study graduation.

Testimonials:

Students:

“I hope that every student will still receive this chance to visit more customers and to allow a deeper insight into the job of a sales representative”.

Partner:

Within the subject of *sales and negotiation skills*, that is part of the schedule of the specialization of *purchasing and sales* within the study of *Business Administration and Engineering*, different practical exercises are included.

„HAURATON therefore takes several students individually for a field sales tour. This way the students are able to experience the sales work first hand and compare the practical side to the theoretical knowledge.

On the other side HAURATON presents each semester the company and the current entry-level career opportunities. HAURATON is very happy to work together with the university and profits from the exchange”.

Purchasing Negotiations

For this part of our concept, the students have to simulate five purchases of complex products in shops in order to analyze if and how the sales representative implements the various sales stages.

The primary objective is to determine how the sales representative performs the needs assessment of the customer and to answer to his objections.

Finally, the “customer” (our student) has to assess whether he felt well advised and what were the reasons of this impression.

Discussion

The aim of this original course's concept is to provide students with a comprehensive theoretical and practical knowledge.

The theoretical background is based on different aspects relating to the transmission of psychological sales foundations. Furthermore, the sales phase's characteristics are discussed in the theory. The students have to work in small groups of case studies, such as analyzing potential customers' objections and the seller reactions. The various sales stages are carried out in the practice in role-playing simulations. For this purpose, the students have to start the semester with the choice of a technical product that can be sold in the B2B sector. The student have to definite the products' characteristics, advantages and benefits and to imagine different competitive skills.

Furthermore, this course's concept gives the students the opportunity to accompany a sales representative in order to live the experience of a technical seller in reality.

CONCLUSION

Our different concepts in the sales teaching ensure a comprehensive training as a sales representative for technical products. The students should be able, with end of the semester, to control and to practice the techniques and the skills of the sales education in the B2B business.

The Role play is an important element of all simulation-based procedures. An improved understanding for methodological aspects facilitates its goal-oriented use in education and training. In the present paper we have described how different a specific form of role play is used in different a sale simulated laboratory. We have discussed many skills demonstrating how may the introduction of role-playing increase perceived realism.

This concept is unique in the education for sales engineers at universities in Germany. The employment of the Graduates is guaranteed. The number of partner companies increases from year to year.

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