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ASSESSMENT OF THE EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE – PREMISE FOR THE INCREASE OF THE QUALITY OF THE DISTRIBUTION SERVICES

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Abstract. *The necessity of assessing the personnel in an organization is imposed by the accelerated rhythm of economic and technical-scientific development, by the emergence of some performing in almost all activity fields, by the fierce competition due to the international extension of many companies' activity. This paper is focused on the necessity of the constant and proper assessment of the human resources performance in a small enterprise in the distribution of tyres. The tyre industry is an important and very dynamic sector within the national economy, with a high performance level, due especially to the presence on the Romanian market of the world greatest tyre producers and distributors. Under these circumstances, on an emergent market, a small enterprise cannot survive unless it offers the best quality services, and this can be fulfilled only by the means of human resources with high performance.*

Key words: employees' performance, distribution services, Romanian tyre industry.

1. Short X-Ray of the Romanian tyre industry

The year 1989 found Romania on an important position from the point of view of tyre production, with the following main producers: I.A. Danubiana, Victoria-Florești, I.A. Drobeta Turnu Severin, I. A. Zalau and I.A. Caracal. The changes that affected the whole Romanian economy did not avoid the field of tyre production. For most of the tyre producers, Romania became interesting as regards the existent production opportunities and from the perspective of sales. Thus can be explained the decision of investing in Romania of producers such as: Michelin, Continental or Pirelli, which purchased Romanian factories supplying new technology or, in certain cases, rebuilding from zero new production facilities. For a long time period, the lack of competitiveness of the Romanian tyre industry was compensated by the skills and the low cost of the labour force, this being the main reason for which Romania was considered by the great tyre producers an attractive market.

The internal tyre market in Romania represents approximately 0.5% on the world market and less than 1.5% on the European market. On the internal market, the tyre sales increased from 4225 thousand pieces a year in 2002 to about 4600 thousand pieces a year in 2005, due to the increase of the car sales. As regards the consumption in 2006, the internal market represents about 250 million euro. In Romania in 2006, the tyre consumption per inhabitant was about 0.21 pieces. This indicator, even if it is far from the consumption in the most developed countries at the world level, is still

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comparable with that of the countries in our geographical area. Most of the tyres produced in the Romanian factories are for export, only 8.5% being for the internal consumption. Another tendency in the field of tyre production is represented by the shift of interest from the cheap tyres to the high performing ones. The global market of the tyres is estimated this year to 2 million units, for cars and utility vehicles. Three quarters of this market are represented by the third line tyres, those with low prices. Until 2011, the percentage of the cheap tyres will decrease from 75%, as it represents for this moment, to 50-55%, as the cars will be renewed.

The Romanian tyre market is dominated by four big world producers that purchased some Romanian tyre factories together with their brands. These are:

- **Goodyear** that has Goodyear and Dunlop brands (superior class), Fulda (medium class) Sava, Debica (economic class) and that differs from the other competitors for the fact that it also involved in the production of natural rubber that is used for the tyre production;
- **Michelin** that produces Michelin (superior class), BF Goodrich Kleber (medium class), Tigar, Kormoran (economic class);
- **Bridgestone-Firestone** that has Bridgestone (superior class), Firestone (medium class), Dayton and Europe (economic class);
- **Continental** that produces Continental (superior class), Semperit, Uniroyal (medium class) and Barum, Viking, Gislaved, Mabor and Matador (economic class).

Besides the four big companies, on the Romanian tyre market there are also some independent producers such as Nokian, Toyo, Kumhoo, Hankook, Yokohama, producers from China.

The year 2007 was dominated also by the four big producers of tyres for cars, commercials and 4x4, Goodyear, Continental, Michelin and Bridgestone/Firestone, that together have approximately 85% of the Romanian market.

Pirelli Italian tyre producer has a share of approximately 5%, while the other actors on the Romanian tyre market do not have a very strong influence as regards the tendencies on the market, taking into account the fact that they cover together about 10% of the market.

As regards the production and distribution of the tyres for tracks, Michelin has about 40% of the market, the Continental group and Goodyear group have 20% each, and Bridgestone/Firestone has a share of about 12%.

Generally, for selling the tyres on the Romanian market, the producers use multiple sales channels:

- a. **Distributors**, which have also multiple collaborators, sell the tyres to:
 - retail companies (car services, vulcanizing shops, car accessories shops);
 - end users – natural persons or fleets;
 - car dealers.

The main distributors on the Romanian tyre market are:

- For Michelin Group: Comnicoserv, Impar, Profile Center;
 - For Goodyear Group: Dinamic92, Comnicoserv, Autonet, Rotis, Educational;
 - For Continental Group: Frank, PLP, Dinamis International, A-Z, Olympic, VSV Invest, EWV;
 - For Bridgestone/Firestone Group: Binar, EWV;
 - For Pirelli Group: Pneurom, Cefin.
- b. retail companies** strongly developed as networks, especially in the big cities;
- c. car dealers and big fleets** (companies that manage fleets).

2. The role of the sales agents in the field of tyre distribution and modalities of improvement of their performance

Generally, the tyre producers (Continental, Michelin, Goodyear, Bridgestone/Firestone and Pirelli) use promotional budgets for obtaining the clients/ distributors loyalty or the increase of the portfolio brands fame (radio/TV campaigns, outdoor publicity, sponsorship of certain social and sport or automobile activities etc.). The efficacy of the latter involves also the obtaining the loyalty the end users of a brand. In order to fulfil this aim, a small enterprise needs on the one hand a good marketing strategy, and on the other hand very good sales agents.

In business, figures say most. Each company wants to maximize the volume of the sales and to gain important market shares from the competitors. In this daily struggle, a big responsibility belongs to the sales agents, as they are directly concerned by the number of buy and sell documents. The position of the sales agents is very important in any company as it represents the connection between the organization and the clients. The agent reflects the image of the company, and the perception the clients get about him will influence in a certain way the future acquisitions – and a satisfied client can turn into a loyal client.

The human resource is considered the most important resource of the organization. The performance of an organization does not depend on the employees' behaviour but on their attitudes, on the awareness of their own status, of their utility reported to the organizational values.

The relationship between the sales agent and organization should satisfy the needs of both parts: on the one hand the sales agent tries to fulfil his aspirations and financial needs; on the other hand the organization attempts to consolidate its position on the market and consequently the financial success.

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Thus, the performance of the organization can be accomplished if it focuses on the individual, on his training, as the individual results and performance become visible in a relatively short time, due to the individuals' high capacity of assimilation and learning. Considered the basic link of the commercial activity of a company, the sales agent should know very well his activity field, as should master sales and negotiation techniques that could help him conclude the transaction.

In order to have performance, a sales agent should have several personal skills, such as: self confidence, calm, intelligence, empathy, ambition, perseverance, competition spirit, the desire to succeed, pragmatism, nice and proper appearance, etc. The professional training by the means of certain communication, sales techniques, and psychology courses can definitely improve these skills (Ward, 1997).

The major errors that an agent can do are the following:

1. Lack of initiative, leading to few activities, carried on negligently, usually without signed contracts;
2. Poor organization and planning of the own activity;
3. Insufficient knowledge and preparation in the field – in this case in the tyre field. The sales agent knows superficially the characteristics of the products he sells and is not able to answer efficiently the questions he is asked;
4. Lack of enthusiasm and energy, necessary in this field;
5. Lack of orientation, towards the client's needs, desires and expectations as regards the product and the relationship agent-client; insufficient attention to the potential clients; speeches that are too long and could annoy the potential customers; useless conversations that are not related to the sale; lack of consideration for the important objections of the clients;
6. Lack of training leading to poor sales and negotiation techniques that can make the client renounce to the sale right before the end of the discussion. The presentations of the advantages of the products should be very good instruments of selling and the agent should know when to ask for more or to give up.
7. The salary is also a motivating factor and can strongly influence the performance of the sales agents (Manolescu, Lefter, Deaconu, 2007).

The system of the salary according to performance is adopted by most of the companies of distribution. Yet, due to the variable commission, related to the variable sales from one month to another, the income of the sales agents vary. In the graphic below we could see the variation of the income from the sales, in various activity fields: automotive, pharmacy, FMCG, hotels, real estate and IT.

The incomes vary from a field to another, due to the sales commissions. For example, in the automotive field, for a month, the number of the sold products is much lower in comparison with the number of products in IT or pharmacy field, even if the value of the product is clearly superior.

At the same time, the entry-level salaries in sales in Romania are lower than those in Europe, while the middle or high level salaries are quite close to those. These

differences are due to the lack of sales specialists in Romania. That is why companies tend to offer a very attractive package of salary and benefits in order to attract and maintain experienced people. The salary packages differ from one field to another, from a company to another. Thus, apart from the fix salary and commission, the luckiest agents can receive a car, personal computer or notebook, telephone.

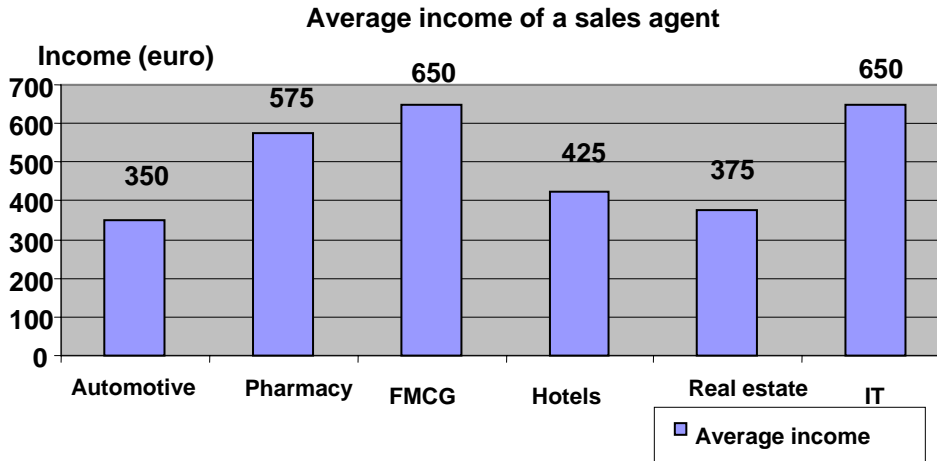


Figure 1. Average income of a sales agent in the main activity fields in Romania

In Romania these tend to become not simple benefits, but work tools, necessary for a proper sales activity.

The payment systems for the sales agents include the following elements, different from one company to another: fix salary, commission, bonuses, premiums, the covering of certain expenditures.

There are cases when the sales agents get only the fix salary or only the commission, leading to advantages and disadvantages for the both parties. It is preferable a mix between these two elements, as the sales agent should be less stressed if in a month he was not able to sell too much. There are many kinds of commissions:

1. **Proportional commission** is most frequently used and consists of the payment according to a percentage of the value of the sold goods.

2. **Differentiated commission** consists of the paying a percentage of the value of the sold goods that exceeds a certain established value. There is also the case when the agent does not get anything because he did not reach that value.

3. **Progressive commission.** The sales agent gets percentage 1 for sales under a sum a , plus percentage 2 for sales between a and b , plus percentage 3 for sales over sum c , where $a < b < c$, and percentage $1 < \text{percentage } 2 < \text{percentage } 3$.

4. **Threshold commission** consists of the payment of an extra sum, plus a certain percentage from the sales if the sales exceeds a certain value, but does not receive anything if he does not reach that value.

5. **Grade commission.** The sales agent gets a% from the sales, if these are < sum x, b% from the sales, if these are between x and y, c% from the sales, if these exceed sum y (Hunt, 2005).

The secret of the increase of the sales efficiency consists of adopting the best practices in a measurable, repeatable process. A sales agent should be able to present the advantages of his tyres in comparison with those of the competitors and should be able to reply immediately to the most important objections of his clients, should know the special offers of the competitors and should be able to make similar, even better offers.

3. The main objectives of the employee assessment within an organization that distributes tyres

The process of assessing the employee performances should regard besides an increase of the motivation of the human resources, especially the identification of the methods that could lead to the increase of the employee performance (mainly of the sales agents) and to attaining fundamental objectives: the increase of the turnover and of the profit of the organization.

Another objective consists of identifying proper payment and benefit modalities, proportional to the performance.

The main changes that will take place regard the fact that the main objective of the company starting from 2008 will be the increase of the volume of sales by the increase of the number of clients, accompanied by a modification of the price policy.

The current structure of the sales department will not be adequate any more under the new circumstances. The efforts will increase especially as regards the extension of the data base with new clients.

By the means of a performance management, this organization has the following objectives:

- To help the improvement of the performance and to the change of attitudes and behaviours according to the organization requirements;
- To mobilize all the employees in order to make them focus on the results;
- To raise the awareness of the employees towards the connection between their performance and the organization objectives;
- To promote the key attitudes and behaviours for each position;
- To assess the individual and team objectives;
- To reward and recognize the individual and team performance;
- To support the efficient communication;
- To favour the professional development for all the employees, helping them to identify their needs, individual objectives and the action plan in the view of attaining these objectives in the future.

4. The procedure of implementation of the system of assessment of the professional performance within an organization that distributes tyres

The procedure of implementation of a performing system of professional assessment was launched at the beginning of January 2008. All the employees of the organization will be assessed annually and the sales agents quarterly.

The assessment will offer the employee the possibility to measure the progress in his work along the assessed period, and the assessor will reveal the efficiency and efficacy that the employee demonstrated in his work.

To evaluate the performance of the personnel there have been used the questionnaire method and the assessment interview (Pitariu, 2006). The assessment interview was based on an interview form that comprises, besides the standard assessment form, the dossier of each employee containing the job description and the comparative results reports.

The assessment of the sales team will take place yearly and annually.

The quarterly assessment has a double utility: besides the fact that are known the company results and the sales perspectives for the next period, it is also used as a base for calculating the commissions from sales.

The quarterly and the yearly assessment will evaluate the sales performance of the team, at the group and at the individual level.

For the assessment there will be used, besides the standard forms, the results dossiers and the monthly sales reports, respectively the analysis of the number of contracts reported to the number of offers, and the number of contracts for each agent.

The results of the assessment will be presented to the top management periodically, usually quarterly, and will be discussed in team or in particular, with each agent.

All the employees will be assessed according to the general and specific criteria defined in a series of specific assessment forms.

Each employee received, starting from 10 October 2007 the assessment criteria, these criteria have been explained and discussed by each department manager with his subordinates.

In order to assess the performance the following elements will be taken into account:

- **quantitative:** the results obtained for accomplishing the tasks specific for the position and the general objectives of the company for the analyzed period;
- **qualitative:** the way in which those results were obtained, taking into consideration the available time and the resources; the contribution to the performance obtained by his team.

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The interests of the company determined by the pyramidal structure of the functions and by the annual number limited to the promotions induce an increased competition on the hierarchical ladder. That is why the employee assessment will be a continuous activity of evaluating, monitoring, counselling and supporting them to fulfil the functional tasks and to use their potential.

As this is a small enterprise, the activity of performance assessment will be carried out in a cycle, every year, and the characteristic steps are:

- Indicating the assessment responsibilities, objectives and organizational and individual priorities – at the beginning of the assessment period, by the managers;
- Monitoring the employee performance and providing their counselling and support for fulfilling their functional tasks and their professional development;
- Evaluation - at the end of the assessment period – of performance and potential of development, and elaborating or updating the individual career plans.

In order to provide the continuity of the assessment process and for the use of the assessors and assessed, there are available evaluation forms that specify: the main functional attributions, the individual and organizational objectives, the self-assessment, the characteristic assessment steps, and the face-to-face discussions between the assessors and the assessed.

The assessment reports contain both specific appreciations, based on certain indicators, and descriptive elements, in order to reveal as accurately as possible the performance and the potential of the assessed person, and to offer a general image of the assessed individual, necessary to a value hierarchy of the employees.

No matter how they are called or grouped, the indicators quantify and synthesize the professional competence, skills or personality profiles of the assessed employees. On this base, it is assessed the potential of an employee at a certain moment, as revealed from the way these skills are applied in the professional activity and result in the performance in accomplishing certain tasks or objectives.

The performance obtained, the professional competence, the personality characteristics, the whole potential are appreciated according to identical measuring scale or different but interrelated. The appraisals can differ from one assessor to the other.

The assessment or the general conclusion derive from the analysis carried on all the characteristics assessed for each employee, in comparison with those obtained by the other employees with a similar position or period of work. Thus it is obtained a global image on the performance and potential of the assessed employee.

On the basis of performance and potential there will be formulated proposals of improvement for immediate or long term perspective.

Assessment of the employees' performance

Each step of the assessment ends with a plan of professional development for the improvement of the individual professional performance of all the employees in the view of increasing the organization competitiveness.

The assessment report will be centralized, analyzed from the point of view of the law compliance, correctness and information content and will be used in the process of selection form hierarchical promotion, rewards or penalties.

The marks for every criterion are:

- **4 Very good**– Overcomes constantly the standard expectances / job requirements
- **3 Good** – Fulfils and sometimes overcomes the standard expectances / job requirements
- **2 Acceptable** – Fulfils usually the standard expectances / job requirements
- **1 Poor** – Manages to fulfil only occasionally the standard expectances / job requirements

Each assessment criterion has a certain weight that marks its importance in comparison with the others and is written on the final assessment form filled in by the assessor in the presence of the assessed at the assessment interview.

The importance scale for each criterion, established by the assessor and the managers of the organization is the following:

- **3 Very important**
- **2 Important**
- **1 Normal**

The point scale is the following:

- **4.00 – 3.09 points – Very good**
 - considered to be among the best employees;
 - according to the repeatability of the qualification mark, a potential candidate for promotion.
- **3.08 – 2.16 points – Good**
 - considered to be in the first half of the employees.
- **2.15 – 1.23 points – Poor**
 - considered to be under the level of the first half of the employees.
- **0.00 points – Very poor**
 - considered unacceptable for the organization

The qualification mark obtained at the end of an assessment period is a source of information for each employee. On this basis individual or organizational decisions can be made.

In order to measure the results of the assessment the following forms will be filled in:

- **Form 1** – Self-assessment– filled in individually by each employee.
- **Form 2** – Assessment by the direct boss– filled in individually by the assessor.

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- **Form 3** – Final assessment – filled in individually by the direct boss, and maybe a second assessor (the Human Resource Manager or the General Manager), at the assessment interview.

We will present below a series of results obtained from the performance assessment process, for two general assessment criteria: the professional dimension „orientation towards the external and internal clients” and „perseverance and responsibility”.

The results from applying the assessment forms for the dimension „orientation towards the external and internal clients” can be synthesized in the following table:

Table 1

The orientation towards external and internal clients

Criterion 1. Orientation towards the external and internal clients		Sales agents assessment				Direct superior assessment			
		Number of persons who had the following mark:				Number of persons who had the following mark:			
		4 (four)	3 (three)	2 (two)	1 (one)	4 (four)	3 (three)	2 (two)	1 (one)
1	Acts towards the benefits of the clients and company	3	4	1	0	3	3	2	0
2	Is polite and positive, an active listener, willing to help and acts consequently.	3	5	0	0	3	3	2	0
3	Identifies/recognizes the needs of the external and internal clients.	3	4	1	0	3	3	2	0
4	Offers solutions and support for solving the problems.	3	4	1	0	3	3	2	0
5	Presentation style, the way of communication and establishing relationships indicates professionalism.	5	3	0	0	4	2	2	0

Assessment of the employees' performance

Criterion 1. Orientation towards the external and internal clients	Sales agents assessment				Direct superior assessment				
	Number of persons who had the following mark:				Number of persons who had the following mark:				
	4 (four)	3 (three)	2 (two)	1 (one)	4 (four)	3 (three)	2 (two)	1 (one)	
6	Knows very well all the departments of the company.	4	2	2	0	3	1	2	2
7	Knows the organizational chart, the hierarchical and competence levels of all the employees.	5	3	0	0	4	3	1	0

Taking into account the importance scale for each criterion, there were obtained the following averages:

Table 2

Criteria averages

Criterion	Self-assessment	Direct superior assessment
Acts towards he benefits of the clients and company	3.25	3.13
Is polite and positive, an active listener, willing to help and acts consequently.	3.38	3.13
Identifies/recognizes the needs of the external and internal clients.	3.25	3.13
Offers solutions and support for solving the problems.	3.25	3.13
Presentation style, the way of communication and establishing relationships indicates professionalism.	3.25	3.25
Knows very well all the departments of the company.	3.63	2.63
Knows the organizational chart, the hierarchical and competence levels of all the employees.	3.63	3.38
<i>GENERAL RESULT</i> "orientation towards the external and internal clients"	<i>3.38</i>	<i>3.11</i>

Graphically, the situation is the following:

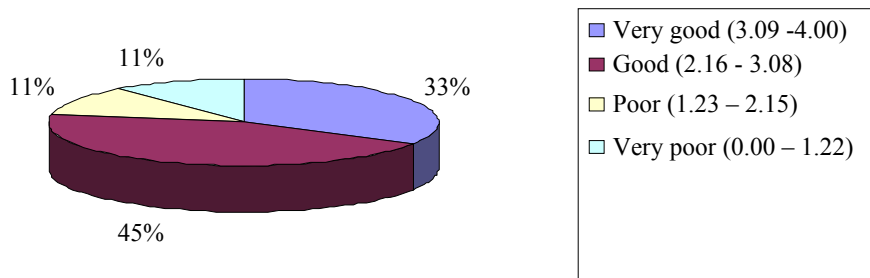


Figure 2. Employee value groups according to the final marks obtained at the dimension “orientation towards the external and internal clients”

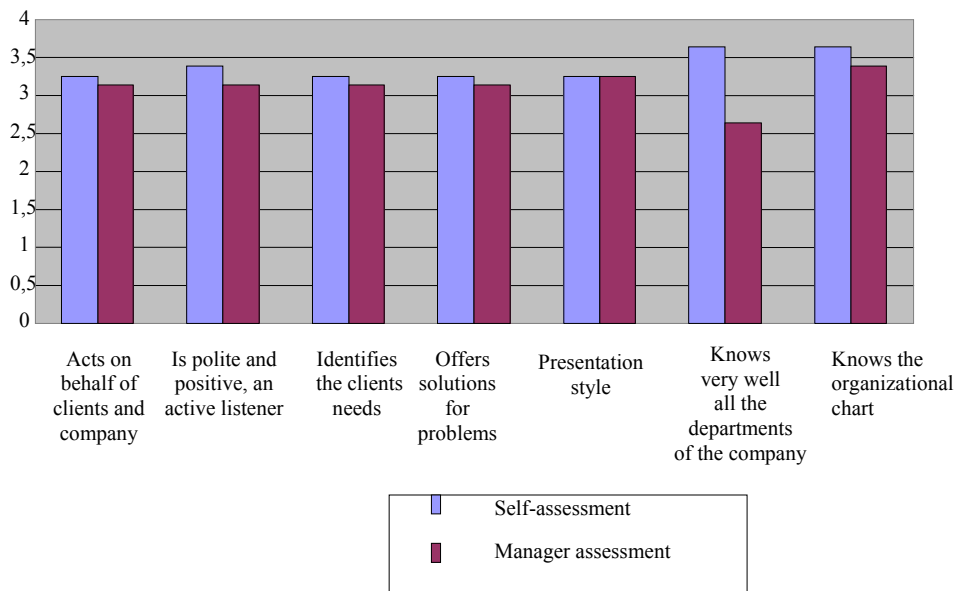


Figure 3. Professional dimension „Orientation towards internal and external clients”

From the chart there can be noticed that apart from the criterion *Presentation style, the way of communication and establishing relationships indicates professionalism*, where the agents’ opinions are identical with those of the hierarchical superiors, the rest of the criteria present smaller or greater differences, due to the more severe but objective assessment of the superiors and to the subjective self-assessments of the agents.

Assessment of the employees' performance

The highest difference is at the section *Knows very well all the departments of the company*, where the average value of the agents is 3.63, and that of the hierarchical superiors is only 2.63. Thus, the two agents got minimal marks from the assessors, who considered that they know very well their responsibilities but do not know very well the rest of the organization activities, as they are new in the company and needs some adaptation time.

The rest of the criteria present very small differences between the two assessments.

The results from applying the assessment forms for the dimension „perseverance and responsibility” can be synthesized in the following table:

Table 3

The „perseverance and responsibility dimension”

Criterion 2. Perseverance and responsibility		Sales agents assessment				Direct superior assessment			
		Number of persons who had the following mark:				Number of persons who had the following mark:			
		4 (four)	3 (three)	4 (four)	3 (three)	4 (four)	3 (three)	4 (four)	3 (three)
1	Has self-confidence and a positive attitude towards the objectives.	5	3	0	0	3	4	1	0
2	Does not give up easily.	4	4	0	0	3	4	2	0
3	Develops permanently their skills and knowledge.	4	4	0	0	2	4	2	0
4	Asks for help for the problems specific for his position.	3	4	1	0	3	2	3	0
5	Proposes useful measures for the good development of his department.	6	2	0	0	4	2	2	0
6	Needs not much control from his boss	4	2	2	0	3	1	2	2

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Criterion 2. Perseverance and responsibility		Sales agents assessment				Direct superior assessment			
		Number of persons who had the following mark:				Number of persons who had the following mark:			
		4 (four)	3 (three)	4 (four)	3 (three)	4 (four)	3 (three)	4 (four)	3 (three)
	and makes proper decisions, assuming full responsibility for his actions.								
7	Sustains with arguments his ideas and participates effectively to the implementation of his proposals.	4	3	1	0	3	4	1	0
8	Reacts positively to constructive criticism.	3	4	1	0	2	3	2	1
9	Accepts the changes in his activity.	4	3	1	0	2	2	4	0
10	Is reliable.	6	2	0	0	4	3	1	0

Taking into account the importance scale for each criterion, there were obtained the following averages:

Table 4

Importance scales for the criteria

Criterion	Self-assessment	Direct superior assessment
Has self-confidence and a positive attitude towards the objectives.	3.625	3.25
Does not give up easily.	3.5	3.5
Develops permanently their skills and knowledge.	3.5	3
Asks for help for the problems specific for his position.	3.25	3
Proposes useful measures for the good development of his department.	3.75	3.25
Needs little control from his boss and makes proper decisions, assuming full responsibility for his actions.	3.25	2.625
Sustains with arguments his ideas and participates effectively to the implementation of his proposals.	3.375	3.25

Assessment of the employees' performance

Criterion	Self-assessment	Direct superior assessment
Reacts positively to constructive criticism.	3.25	2.75
Accepts the changes in his activity.	3.375	2.75
Is reliable.	3.75	3.375
<i>GENERAL RESULT "Perseverance and responsibility"</i>	<i>3.47</i>	<i>3.09</i>

Graphically, the situation is the following:

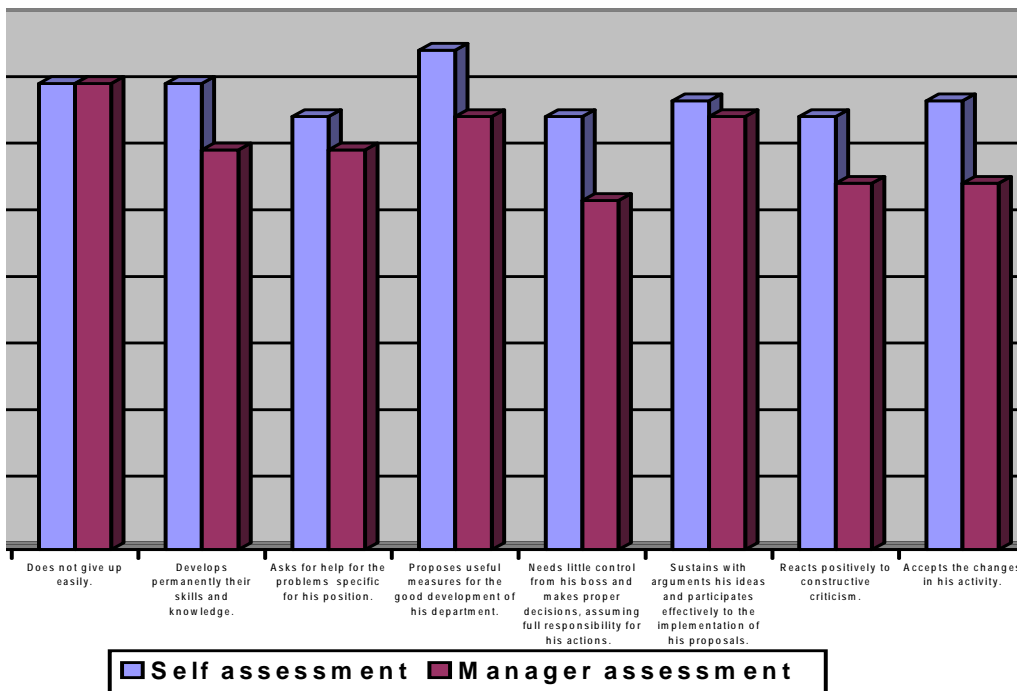


Figure 5. Comparison between self assessment and management assessment of the employees

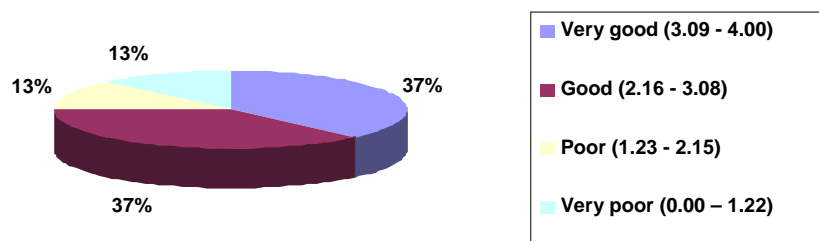


Figure 6. Employee value groups according to the final marks obtained at the dimension „Perseverance and responsibility”

The criterion *Needs little control from his boss and makes proper decisions, assuming full responsibility for his actions* is that for which the differences between the hierarchical superiors' assessments and the agents' self-assessments presents the highest differences. The main argument is due to the presence in the company of two new employees who require a certain accommodation time. For this reason the hierarchical superiors considered that the dialogues with them are more frequent so that the degree of control is not as high as in the case of the other sales agents.

Thus, analyzing the first chart, we can notice that most of the agents were grouped in the categories *Very good* and *good* and only 13% in the *poor*. Our recommendation is: the two new sales agents should be integrated easily and should be granted the necessary confidence in order to successfully overcome the initiation and to acquire the way of work specific to the analyzed organization.

Conclusions

Applying the assessment procedure in advance on the sales agents was a good decision, thus they became aware quickly of the assessment process and of the procedure.

In general the assessment of the sales agents lead to good and very good results. The few negative elements identified will be used in order to take the measures necessary for the improvement of the company performance.

Table 5

The results of the assessment criteria

Dimensions	Self-assessment	Assessment hierarchical superior
Orientation towards internal and external clients	3.38	3.11
Perseverance and responsibility	3.47	3.09
Comply with the deadlines	3.29	2.97
Team work	3.25	3
Enthusiasm	3.58	3.1
Communication	3.59	3.16
General culture	3.85	3.6
Respects and transmits the values of the organization	3.46	3.2

These can be synthesized in the following chart:



Figure 7. The results of applying the assessment criteria

Although on the whole the differences are not high, there are certain discrepancies between the subjective assessment of the sales agent and the objective assessments of the hierarchical superiors. The dimension where the highest score was obtained was *General culture*. By training, by more often discussions between the managers and the agents these differences can be improved.

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