

## FACTORS OF SUCCESS IN SALES

What characterizes a successful seller? A variety of misconceptions have established themselves in company life. For example, successful salespersons are described as extroverts and technically knowledgeable people. This seems to make sense – but research fails to confirm this ...

**Industry:** Financial services – personnel recruitment and development

### The customer's problem

The customer faced the issue of a high level of personnel fluctuation. This reinforced the company's interest in factors for success that would help them to identify successful salespersons in personnel recruitment. At the same time, the factors for success were to form the basis for personnel development.

### Theoretical principles

Sales is a job where the greatest differences in performance between staff occur.<sup>1</sup> Performance differences can be explained to a substantial extent by differences in the salespersons' personality.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, identifying personality problems that sales staff faces is becoming increasingly important because it provides a basis for tailored training and leadership actions, which in turn are the most effective.<sup>3</sup>

Against the background briefly described here, effex's task was to determine enterprise-specific, success-relevant personality traits of the purchaser's sales staff.

### Practical implementation

A standardized, written questionnaire was used for data acquisition. It covered the characterization of personality variables which have been shown to be relevant to success in scientific research. Some 400 sales staff of the enterprise under investigation took part in the survey. The evaluation aimed to identify statistically significant correlations between personality traits and the success of the staff.

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<sup>1</sup> Hunter, J. E., Schmidt, F. L., & Judiesch, M. K. (1990). Individual differences of alternative predictors of job performance. *Psychological Bulletin*, 96, 72-98; Schuler, H. (2000). *Psychologische Personalauswahl* (3. Aufl.) Göttingen: Verlag für angewandte Psychologie.

<sup>2</sup> McManus, M. A., & Kelly, M. L. (1999). Personality measures and biodata: Evidence regarding their incremental predictive value. *Personnel Psychology*, 52, 137-148; Neuman, G. A., & Kickul, J. R. (1998). Organizational citizenship behaviors: Achievement orientation and personality. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 13, 263-279.

<sup>3</sup> Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K. (1991). The Big Five personality dimensions and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 44, 1-26; Nerdinger, F. W. (2001). *Psychologie des persönlichen Verkaufs*. München: Oldenbourg.

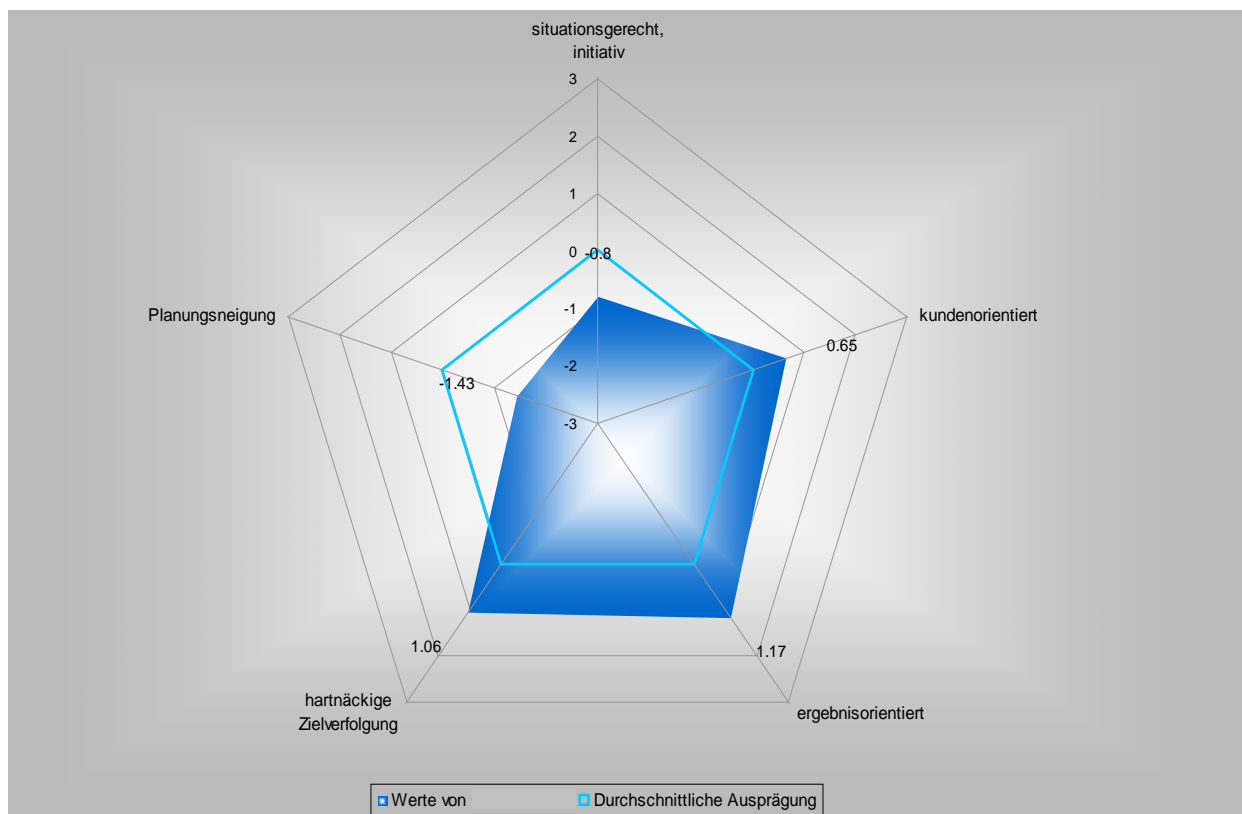
CASE STUDY  
CHANGING BEHAVIOR - KNOWING WHAT

**Impact**

The evaluation generated an enterprise-specific personality profile for the successful salesperson, which was then deployed for more effective staff selection (cf. fig.). Additionally, the employee-specific personality profiles provided the basis for effective and individualized staff training and leadership. Sales success cannot be achieved by generic recipes for success, as is so often attempted.

**Excerpt from a feedback example**

Figure: Personality profile of Mr./Ms. XY



**Appropriate to the situation, initiative**

Definition: Salespersons who act in a manner that is appropriate to the situation, and take the initiative, love challenging tasks, are open to new situations, and intensively search for new ways of managing them. They enjoy interacting with the customer, where they want to find out how they can improve their sales skills and worry less about potential mistakes.

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CASE STUDY  
CHANGING BEHAVIOR - KNOWING WHAT

Characterization of Mr./Ms. XY: below average (-0.8) (cf. Figure)

Recommendations: Attempt to increase the number of sales strategies that you have by trying out new approaches. Make sure that you repeatedly, consciously enter into new situations. In preparation you can, for example, accompany other staff to see how they master a certain situation. Ask yourself time and time again how a specific customer differs from another and act in a flexible way. Always be aware that only the customer knows the truth about himself. Always verify the success of new approaches. To this end, ask for feedback from other staff or from your superior. Do not regard any failures as a personal defeat, but as a chance to learn new skills. Always orient your behavior on what you can influence yourself. Do not waste time on being angry about the situation or the framework conditions.

**Customer oriented**

Definition: Customer-oriented salespersons tend to increase long-term customer satisfaction with their behavior, potentially at the cost of current sales. The customer-oriented salesperson supports the customer in identifying their needs and seeks an appropriate solution for their problem.

Characterization of Mr./Ms. XY: above average (0.65)

[...]