

# Sales Force Training in the Turkish Pharmaceutical Industry

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**Sales Force Training in the Turkish Pharmaceutical Industry**  
**Summary** : All production and marketing activities result in sales. One of the purposes of sales force training is to increase sales performance of salespeople for the benefit of the firm. Therefore, there is a strong relation between sales force training and success of the company.

The purpose of this study is to understand the realization of sales force training programs in Turkish Pharmaceutical Industry; which criteria they use, the frequency of the programs, which training methods they use, who the trainers are and to whom this training is given. A questionnaire with 24 questions is applied to Training&Development Departments, Sales/Marketing Managers or Human Resource Managers in charge of sales force training, in 51 pharmaceutical companies, 37 of which are members of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association, 14 of which use the services provided by the organization.

At the end of the study, the firms which answered the questionnaire stated that they found the role of sales/marketing department very important in determining the requirements of sales force training program and the increasing productivity of the sales as the primary aim of the sales force training program. The firms also stated that they have training specialists and training programs for trainers and they subject inexperienced salespeople to a training program for less than 3 months.

**Key Words:** Sales Training Program, Sales Force Training, Salesperson, Turkish Pharmaceutical Industry.

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## Türk İlaç Endüstrisinde Satış Ekibi Eğitimi

**Özet** : Tüm üretim ve pazarlama işlemleri satışla sonuçlanır. Satış ekibi eğitiminin bir amacı, eğitim gören satış elemanlarının satış performanslarını firmaya yararlı olacak biçimde arttırmaktır. Dolayısıyla satış ekibi eğitimi ile işletmenin başarısı arasında çok yakın bir ilişki vardır.

Bu çalışmanın amacı; Türk ilaç endüstrisinde satış personeli eğitiminin nasıl yapıldığını, eğitim programının hangi kriterlere göre ne sıklıkta uygulandığını, hangi eğitim yöntem ve tekniklerinin kullanıldığını ve eğitimin kim tarafından kimlere verildiğini belirlemektir. Bu çalışmada, İlaç Endüstrisi İşverenler Sendikası üyesi olan 37 ve sendika hizmetlerinden yararlanan 14 firma olmak üzere toplam 51 ilaç firmasının Eğitim ve Geliştirme Bölümüne, Eğitim ve Geliştirme Bölümü olmayan firmalarda satış ekibi eğitiminden sorumlu Satış/Pazarlama Müdürleri ya da İnsan Kaynakları Müdürleri'ne 24 sorudan oluşan anket uygulanmıştır.

Çalışma sonucunda, firmaların uyguladıkları satış ekibi eğitim programı ihtiyacının belirlenmesinde satış/pazarlama bölümünün rolünü çok önemli buldukları, satış ekibi eğitim programının birincil amacının satış verimini arttırmak olduğu, satış ekibi eğitimini sunması için eğitim uzmanlarını kullandıkları, eğiticiler için bir eğitim programına sahip oldukları, tecrübesiz satış elemanlarını işe aldıktan sonra 3 aydan az bir eğitime tabi tuttukları tespit edilmiştir.

**Anahtar kelimeler** : Satış eğitim programı, Satış Ekibi Eğitimi, Satış Elemanı, Türk İlaç Endüstrisi.

## INTRODUCTION

Salespeople are professionals that provide relations between company and customers. Each salesperson needs knowledge and skill for doing his/her task and the key element in obtaining this knowledge and skill is training<sup>1</sup>. Training is an important factor for a salesman's success. A well-designed training pro-

gram shows the sales force how to make a sale and it also gives an opportunity to sales managers to determine their expectations from the sales force.

Although the specific objectives of sales training may vary from firm to firm, there is some agreement on the broad objectives. These objectives are<sup>2-4</sup>:

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- 1- Increased Productivity
- 2- Improved Customer Relations
- 3- Improved Communication
- 4- Lowered Turnover
- 5- Improved Morale
- 6- Improved Self-Management.

Sales training programs may be divided into two<sup>5</sup>: "initial training programs" and "renewing training programs". Initial training programs are designed for newly employed personnel. Renewing training programs are designed for experienced personnel in order to update and improve their sales skills<sup>6</sup>.

For planning a sales training program, the needs of the sales force should be determined first then specific objectives that meet this need should be set and lastly a budget that realizes these objectives should be determined. After determining the needs of the sales force, and setting specific objectives and a budget for training, a number of decisions critical to the success of the individual training program must be addressed. These decisions include<sup>3</sup>:

- What topics to cover,
- Where to conduct the training,
- Who should be the trainer,
- What training methods to use.

Generally a sales training program includes; knowledge about the product, knowledge about the company, market/industry orientation, knowledge of customers. Beside these topics, it also includes knowledge of competitive products, time-management skills and selling skills<sup>2-4, 7-9</sup>.

Sales training can be centralized or decentralized. Centralized training occurs when all salespeople to be trained are brought to one central location. Decentralized training occurs in the field or at regional sales offices, which moves the learning process closer to the customers<sup>2,3</sup>.

The efficiency of training is measured by skilled trainers employed in the work for training<sup>10</sup>. There are three types of trainers in firms: regular line ex-

ecutives, staff personnel and external specialists<sup>4</sup>.

Generally, several different teaching methods may be used to present material in a sales training program. The most commonly used methods for sales training are<sup>1-4,7,8,10-13</sup>:

- Role-playing,
- Lectures,
- Cases,
- Panels,
- Discussion,
- On the job training,
- Computer assisted training,
- Audio-visual training methods.

Whichever method or methods are applied in training, training benefits need to be estimated. Otherwise training will be a "plus cost element" for companies<sup>11</sup>. To evaluate a training program, results must be measurable. These results are classified in four categories; reactions, learning, behavior and results<sup>14,15</sup>.

The continuity of training is the primary condition for the success of the training program<sup>10</sup>.

The purpose of this study is to understand the realization of sales force training programs in Turkish Pharmaceutical Industry; which criteria they use, the frequency of the programs, which training methods they use, who the trainers are and to whom this training is given.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

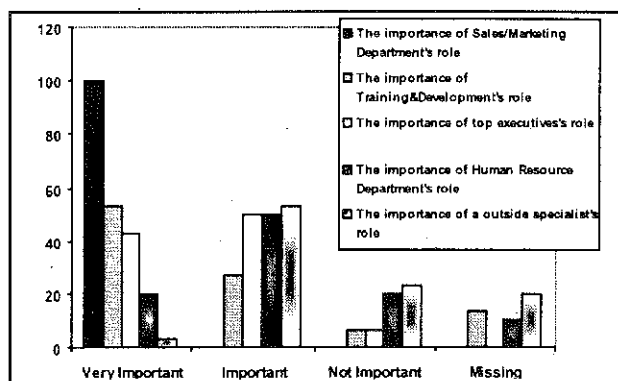
In this study, a questionnaire with 24 questions prepared with the help of other studies in different industries<sup>16-18</sup> is applied to Training&Development Departments, Sales/Marketing Managers or Human Resource Managers in charge of sales force training, of 51 pharmaceutical companies, 37 of which are members of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association, 14 of which uses the services provided by the Association<sup>19</sup>. At the same time this population forms the universe of the study. Answers to the questionnaire are used as the material of the study.

After coding the answers of the survey, SPSS (ver. 7.5) statistics software is used in order to analyze the data.

**FINDINGS**

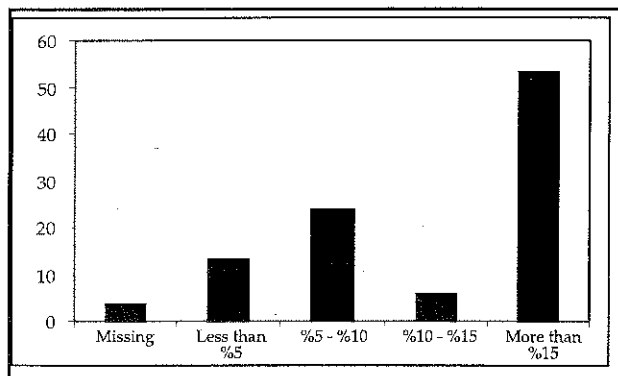
The assessments of the findings obtained from the answers of the questionnaire are given below.

Graph 1 shows the departments within the company which determine the needs of sales force training programs. All of the firms evaluated the role of sales/marketing department as very important in determining the needs of a sales force training program.



Graph 1. Departments within the company which determine the needs of sales force training programs

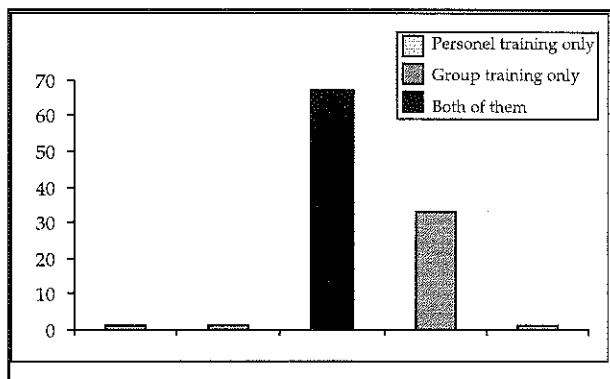
In Graph 2, the ratio of sales training budget to training budget of the firms is given in percentage.



Graph 2. The percentage of sales training budget

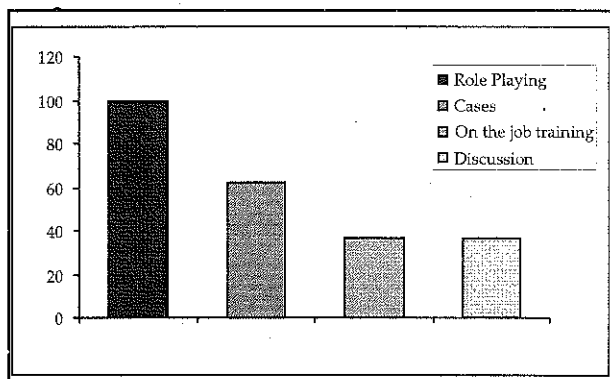
It can be observed that more than half of the firms use the training budget with more than 15% share for sales training.

The application style of sales force training in firms is shown in Graph 3. According to this, firms use mostly "group training methods only", less than half of them use both "personal" and "group" training methods. None of the firms use "personal training only" methods.



Graph 3. The application style of sales force training

The training methods used in sales force training are shown in Graph 4.

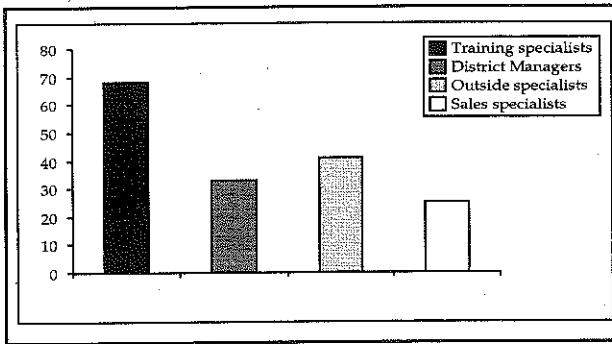


Graph 4. Training methods used in training

While the majority of the firms use "role playing", most of them use "cases" which are group training methods in sales force training. Also "on the job training", which is a personal training method, and "discussion", which is a group training method, are used in sales force training.

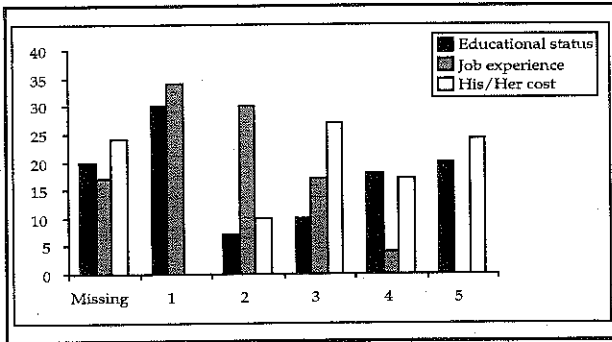
Sales trainers are shown in Graph 5. According to this

graph, sales training is mostly given by training specialists.



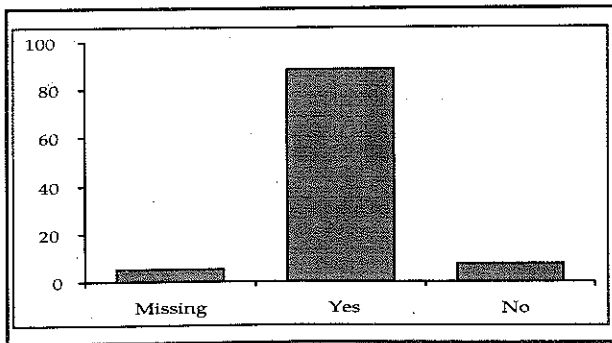
Graph 5. Distribution of sales trainers in firms

Characteristics that firms take into consideration to choose sales trainers are shown in Graph 6. According to this, most of the firms take into consideration the job experience of trainers for choosing them.



Graph 6. Characteristics that firms take into consideration to choose sales trainers

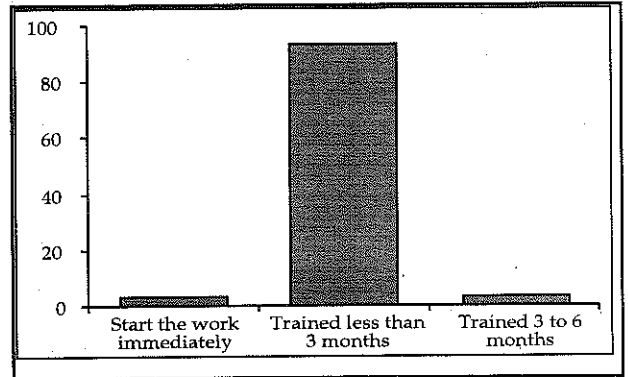
Graph 7 shows whether managers in firms participate in training program as sales trainers or not.



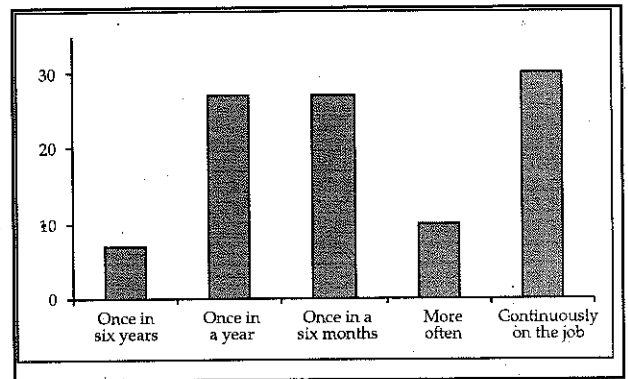
Graph 7. Participation of managers in training program as sales trainer

As can be seen, most of the firms use managers as trainers.

Graph 8 shows duration and Graph-9 shows timing of training programs for new salespeople and for experienced salespeople.



Graph 8. Duration of training program for new sales people

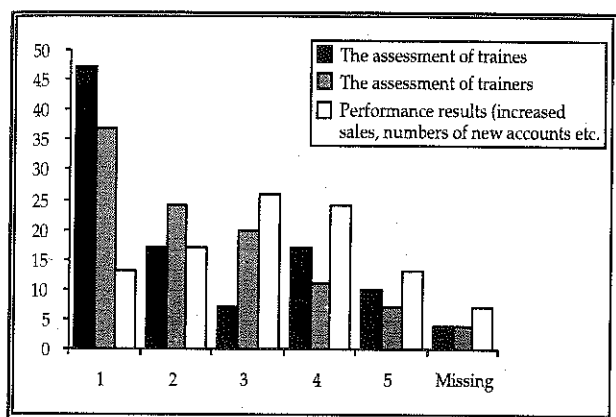


Graph 9. Timing of renewing training program for experienced salespeople

In most of the firms, new recruits start work after the initial program that lasts less than 3 months and the renewing training program for experienced salespeople is applied once a year, once in six months and continuously on the job.

The assessments of trainees, the assessment of trainers and performance results (increased sales, numbers of new accounts etc.) which are used to evaluate sales force training program in firms are given in Graph 10. According to this, most of the firms use the assessment of trainees and the assessment of trainers

to evaluate training program at the first rank.



Graph 10. The importance of criterions that are used to evaluate the sales training program.

## RESULT and DISCUSSION

This questionnaire survey on "Sales Force Training in Turkish Pharmaceutical Industry" was conducted in 51 pharmaceutical companies, 37 of which are members of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association and 14 of which uses the services provided by the Association. 30 out of 51 pharmaceutical companies answered the questionnaire.

The following is the summary of results based on the data provided by firms;

While recruiting salespeople, most of the firms consider the harmony of personnel characteristics with job profile and educational background in the first place; references and gender are considered last. As a result of this, while recruiting salespeople, companies do not discriminate based on sex or references as it is widely thought. When asking the firms about the most important reason of the failure of a salesperson, the firms stated that "the lack of sales training" and "the lack of medical knowledge" come in the first two places. To understand this result, the firms think that right sales training influences salespeople's success positively. While determining the requirements of sales force training program, they agreed that observing salespeople and asking what they need to know will help them perform more effectively. Also management objectives are frequently used sources

of information by the firms while customer information and company records are used as secondary sources of information. Also all of the firms (100%) stated that the role of sales/marketing department is very important in determining the requirements of sales force training program. According to most of the firms (83.3%), "increasing productivity of the sales" is the primary aim of the sales force training program; and "lowered turnover" is evaluated as the last position. Although, it is known that high turnover is very costly; firms are not necessarily aware that the turnover can be reduced with a well-thought-out training program. When asking the firms the share of training budget for sales training, it is determined that more than half of the firms (53.3%) have allotted more than 15% share of training budget for sales training. Half of the firms among 30 stated that their training programs are organized by their own training departments, while they also stated that the first thing a sales person should learn is "product specifications".

While most of the firms prefer independent centers for a training program's location, the minority of the firms prefer a combination of the centralized and decentralized training. In general it is believed that the best training for a new employee would be in central offices or technical training in independent training centers and practical training in regional offices. For experienced employees it is believed that the best training would be a choice between decentralized and centralized training for the best result. When asking firms about the training methods of sales training, it is determined that most of the firms (66.7%) use "only group training" methods, while "role playing" and "case studies" are the most frequently used methods among group training methods. It is also determined that the firms who use "personal training" methods beside "group training" methods use "on the job training" method with participation of more experienced salesperson. Other methods such as "audio-visual training", "computer assisted training", "discussion" and "panel" are not adequately used. Most of the firms (66.7%) have trainers for their sales training programs and have their executives as trainers (90%). When choosing a trainer, job experience

and educational background are taken into consideration first and cost is a secondary consideration and most of the firms (60%) have training programs for trainers. Almost all of the firms (93.3%) have training programs lasting less than three months for a new salesperson before starting work. For experienced salespeople; 6,7% of the firms organize programs once in two years, 26,7% of the firms every year, 26,7% of the firms twice a year, 10% of the firms more than twice a year and 30% of the firms continuously have sales training programs. Finally, evaluation of a Sales Training Program is generally made based on the assessment of trainees and trainers.

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