

EPIC: 2013-1-PL1-LEO05- 37888

EPIC - Enhancing and Promoting International Business Communication

NEW COURSE FOR VOCATIONAL COLLEGES: THE LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION BUSINESS CONSULTANT TRAINING PROGRAMME

WHY THERE IS A NEED FOR A NEW KIND OF TRAINING PROGRAMME

International companies increasingly need to trade across a range of different cultures and use many languages. This is the impact of globalisation on trade. In the past, small and medium-sized European companies usually traded across their nearest borders. In the 21st Century, average companies often trade in ten or more different countries, each with their different culture and language.

The Need for New Language Skills and Cultural Knowledge

Just over 2 in 5 of European small and medium-sized companies are active in some form of international activity; about a quarter are involved in direct export. The larger the company, the more it tends to internationalise.

In a recent European Commission survey of export companies:

- Over 1 in 10 small and medium-sized companies declared they had lost a contract for lack of foreign languages
- 2 out of 5 expected to acquire new language skills in the near future

Amongst the nearly 200 companies that lost actual or potential contracts for lack of foreign languages, 37 valued the lost business at between €8 million and €13.5 million. A further 54 companies had lost contracts between €16.5 million and €25.3 million, and 10 had lost contracts worth over €1 million.

Reasons listed by companies for their communication failures:

- Staff (just) couldn't speak the language
- Enquiries not followed up for information or quotations not followed up
- Lack of confidence in using the foreign language
- Breakdown on receiving foreign call to phone or switchboard
- Errors in poor translation or interpreting
- Inability to capitalise on opportunities
- Lack of cultural affinity.

The Confederation of Danish Industries carried out a survey among their member companies in 2007 which showed that languages other than English are used by more than a third of all companies and that 4 companies out of 10 have experienced more or less serious communication problems with trade partners in other countries as a result of linguistic deficits.

The Austrian *Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft* published a report projecting future problems in Austria, which is one of the few countries where the language skills among the

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general population have actually gone down according to the Eurobarometer. In addition to English, the companies will need Italian and the languages of the trading partners in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular Czech, Slovak and Hungarian.

When European SMEs are asked which languages they use for business communication in their major export markets, English is generally pre-dominant for the majority. But there is widespread use of other languages, too.

- German is frequently used for exporting to 15 markets (including Germany and Austria)
- Russian is frequently used to trade in the Baltic States, Poland and Bulgaria
- French is frequently used in 8 markets, including France, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Where using the customer's language can bring additional benefits to a company:

- Creating a positive rapport and 'trust' with major customers
- Showing respect for issues of diversity and cultural and religious differences
- Showing evidence of a long-term commitment to a foreign market
- Setting the example to employees and foreign clients that 'you mean business'
- Increasing the flow of market intelligence and customer feedback, and understanding its real meaning.

Most businesses rely on establishing a rapport, or sense of trust, with their clients. In other words, the ability to create a social or personal (one-to-one) relationship can also be a vital ingredient of successful trade.

"Talking to customers in their own language leads to better communication and can avoid misunderstandings. It shows our customer or business partner that we plan a long-term commitment to their market. Each partner is more confident in business meetings and "speaking the same language" can save time, allow for a more relaxed meeting and result in better business." (Nikwax Ltd, UK, Pimlico Study)

Cultural differences are another, related communication barrier, where about 1 in 5 European companies report meeting barriers. Some major areas where cultural hot-spots vary from culture to culture and any one of these could occur with the potential to damage your business are:

- How you address people and in what order
- How you relate to gender and age
- How you relate to authority
- Decision making processes
- Personal space
- Material wealth
- Management and purpose of meetings.

Meetings held in some countries, for example, are quite unlike those in others. Issues like punctuality, who is present, and the content of agendas can vary enormously from culture to

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culture. In some cultures, the purpose is to ratify the boss’s decision, in others they are to discuss and debate the issue prior to a consensual decision.

- If a European manager goes to East Asia and expects to achieve concrete agreements on his or her first trip, disappointment is almost guaranteed.
- Showing signs of impatience as you sit in the Middle East, sipping tea and waiting to talk business with your prospective buyer, will certainly do you no favours.
- Addressing your German hosts by their first names at an early business meeting can sometimes provoke a negative reaction since informality normally takes many years.
- The business traveller in many parts of Asia should be aware of the respect given to business cards - and the exchange of business cards is often a ceremony in itself.
- Business people who translate their business cards (and job titles) into the local language will be one step ahead of much of the competition.

These four language techniques are connected with higher export sales:

- Recruiting native speakers from your target markets into the company
- Appointing company employees who already possess language skills
- Using professional translators and/or interpreters
- Having a language plan, or strategy, in place on how you intend to handle communication barriers before you embark on exporting to a particular country.

Language Measure

Percentage increase in export share of sales	%
<i>Hire staff with language skills</i>	<i>16.6</i>
<i>Language strategy in place in advance</i>	<i>13.5</i>
<i>Employ native speakers</i>	<i>7.0</i>
<i>Use professional translators</i>	<i>7.4</i>
<i>Source: ELAN, 2006</i>	

The web has already made it easier for SMEs of all sizes to overcome some of the barriers to internationalisation. Looking broadly across the European SME sector, 65% of all SMEs report having their own website. The figure ranges from 63% for micro enterprises, 80% for small enterprises to 90% for medium-sized enterprises. Website adaptation to the customer’s local language and culture is frequent in the ELAN study with over 50% of businesses in 22 countries having websites in languages other than the national language, most frequently English (which about 6 out of 10 had).

All the exemplar European export companies have invested in multilingual websites – the range of languages depends on the market size and its attitude towards English.

In various parts of Europe, a new consultancy scheme has been developed, largely designed in association with local chambers of commerce, this is the Language Communication Audit (LCA) Training Course. Its purpose is to audit or review the foreign language needs of export

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companies and enable companies to develop a *Language Management Strategy* (LMS) as a method of overcoming language and cultural barriers.

Successful companies have developed LMS which contains a series of measures to manage particular language problems:

Common Language Techniques Used by Top Ten Successful Export Companies

Language Management Techniques	IKO	Evricom	Filc	Golla Oy	Kart. Huber	Danfo	Nikwax	Steel-Press	Stendera	Tarmeko
1. Language training for staff	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Intercultural training for staff		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Recruit staff with language skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Recruit native speakers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Recruit local agents for language issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Employ professional translators/interpreters	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7. Buddying/secondment schemes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
8. Cooperation with universities		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		
9. Multilingual website (3+ languages)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10. Cultural adaptation of website	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source PIMLICO Study (2011)

The Language Communication Audit (LCA) Training Course for Vocational Students

Purpose of Programme: To train as a professional Language and Communication Auditor and receive a certificate

Description: Students will understand how to review and analyse International Communication in international companies and will measure foreign language and cultural deficiencies and learn how to recommend solutions including the development and adoption of a *Language Management Strategy*.

Learning Outcomes: On completing the course, students will be able to

- Undertake a Language and Communication Audit inside a company or international organisation
- Operate as a Communications Consultant, specializing in finding optimal solutions to overcome language and cultural barriers in trade

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- Analyse communication gaps arising from underperformance, or deficiencies, in foreign language knowledge, competence and skills of the target export market
- Undertake an analysis of cultural information gaps for a given international market
- Undertake a critique of a company's international website and review its suitability and effectiveness in international trade
- Understand the concept and definitions of Language Management Strategy (LMS)
- Understand the full range of language and cultural solutions (training and non-training) mapped to a company's communication needs
- Identify, formulate and cost a range of different solutions to communication deficiencies in international companies
- Design foreign language training programmes on the basis of a formalized Training Needs Analysis (TNA)
- Design a Cultural Training Programme for teaching business people how to operate in a given foreign business culture
- Write a consultancy report for a company client making a minimum of three costed recommendations for solving the communication problems
- Enable the company to develop their customised *Language Management Strategy*

A *Language Management Strategy* is where a company adopts-creates a package of different measures and techniques to pre-empt language and cultural barriers in a new or expanding foreign market.

The strategy is the plan they have in place for dealing with particular communication issues relevant to that market. Many of these methods can be transferred to other markets. As companies enter new markets, they tend to adapt the same strategy to new language and cultural needs.

A *Language Management Strategy* could be made up of several different measures:

- use of local agents to solve language problems;
- creation of specially culturally and/or linguistically adapted websites;
- use of linguistic audits;
- use of professional translators/interpreters;
- translation of promotional, sales and/or technical material;
- language training and cultural briefing schemes;
- online language learning;
- employee selection and recruitment policy;
- encouraging employee mobility, 'buddying' and secondment schemes;
- forging links with local universities;
- taking on foreign student on placement;
- native-speaker recruitment;
- e-commerce involving multilingual operations;
- product or packaging adaptation in line with local tastes and customs.

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Syllabus:

Session 1: Understanding Language deficiencies in a given company and how they impact on successful international trade and commerce

Session 2: Understanding Cultural deficiencies in a given company and how they impact on successful international trade and commerce

Session 3: The role of a Consultant: operating procedures, objectivity, ethical considerations and commercial good practice

Session 4: What is an LCA? Defining the Language & Communication Audit (LCA) and measuring its value to companies

Session 5: The Language Management Strategy (LMS): recognition of the LMS, its definition, content, specialist features

Session 6: The Process of the LCA: Setting up the LCA scheme, implementing the LCA, stages, methods of interviewing, data-gathering and data analysis and reporting

Session 7: Models of company analysis: the TNA, analysing communication flows

Session 8: Marketing the LCA into the business market

Session 9: The Reporting and Follow-up Process