

Case Study Two - Blended Training in China

Background

As the Chinese economy continues to grow at unprecedented rates multi-national companies are continuing to invest more and more resources into their Chinese operations. This has led to an ever increasing demand for quality language training for all aspects of business communications. These corporations set high standards for their executives and expect them to be fully functional in a business environment where English is the designated language of communication.

Blended language training, looking at writing and oral skills training in both online and face-to-face formats, is an excellent way to address these wide ranging needs and we are seeing an increasing demand for this service. There are three main reasons why blended training can be an effective solution:

1. It provides a multi-functional approach to training;
2. The commitment to learning by participants over a long period is maintained through various approaches and styles; and
3. It can reduce time and cost expenditure for staff.

Recent examples of such blended programs in Beijing include R&D engineers for one of the worlds leading network solutions providers, and a PR manager for a major shipping and logistics firm. Let us look in more detail at the case of the network solutions provider.

Need

The target group consisted of 105 R&D engineers located in one of the company's major global R&D centres. Although staff use English in their daily work there were considerable needs for improvements in both written and oral communication skills.

The client had several objectives:

- To improve participants' writing skills, specifically email and report writing, to a standard in which foreign staff could read and understand the writer with little or no difficulty.
- To raise oral skills to a suitable level in which they have few problems communicating with offices in North America, France, or India by telephone or in teleconferences.
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With such a high number of participants, scheduling was critical in order to maintain continuity and progress throughout.

Solutions

After detailed discussions with the client, The Language Key was able to put together a comprehensive eight month program focusing on key oral and writing skills. Both face to

face and distance learning methods were used in order to meet the objectives of the client without reducing the quality of the program.

Content was tailored to the participants' level and work based needs by The Language Key's trainers, several of whom have extensive experience in the IT and telecommunications sector. The trainer was also carefully chosen not only for his strong language training skills and experience teaching Chinese speakers, but also for his background in this business sector. This allowed him to fully understand the issues these participants face in their everyday work.

One major issue was that of time. As is often the case, these staff were very busy and could not dedicate numerous hours per week to face-to-face training. Therefore, the writing element of the course was constructed in part as a distance learning program. Tutorials and assignments would be sent to staff on a monthly basis. Returned assignments would be assessed and returned to staff with in-depth constructive feedback.

However, feedback is only of use if the participant fully reads and understands it. This is one of the major weaknesses of distance learning. As such, we introduced bi-monthly writing workshops for the staff, in which they would have the opportunity to discuss their work with the trainer who had assessed it. This greatly increased the impact of the writing skills training.

The main focus of the in-class training was oral skills. As mentioned, the program ran for eight months. For the first four months daily oral skills classes were provided for staff. Once this intensive section of the program finished staff would have the opportunity to apply the skills learnt into the workplace.

However, rather than finish there and hope that everything was ok, The Language Key followed up this program with several oral skills workshops over the following four months. The principle being that this allowed staff to come back to the trainer for help with new issues or recurring problems rather than leaving them to solve them by themselves.

To summarize, the most effective solution was for a 16 week oral skills program with two follow up oral skills mini-workshops. For writing skills The Language Key's online writing course was revised and expanded to make it 8 modules in total. These would stretch over the entire 8 month period of the course and 4 writing skills mini-workshops would take place every second month.

Upon completion of the pre-course assessment it was decided to place the participants in five different levels for the oral skills course and three levels for the writing skills course. Each level would be designed to suit the needs of the trainees in that group. Following this the material was tailored to suit telecommunications R&D.

As you are most probably aware, one of Language Key's specialties is tailoring courses to the exact needs of trainees. Therefore, we used one of our trainers with an extensive

background in the telecoms industry to design an R&D specific program. This added a huge amount of relevance to the material, thus increasing the overall impact of the course.

Key Factors to Success

Several factors led to the success of this program. First and foremost was the careful preparation that went into the course, ensuring that full pre-course testing was done for each and every student, including a tailored written exam, grammar test, and individual oral benchmark interview conducted by the trainer running the course. As stated, the materials were tailored specifically for telecommunications R&D, thus giving them much more relevance for the participants.

As with all courses, the choice of trainer was of paramount importance and The Language Key trainer who provided training for the entire program delivered an excellent program. The commitment required by the trainer was considerable, but it was agreed by all parties that this was the most effective option in allowing the trainer to grasp the greatest possible understanding of the participants needs and company policies.

Finally, the support services put in place ensured that such a long term and, in parts, intensive program progressed smoothly. Regular communication took place with participants and management as to the progress of the course. Material was provided to each participant ahead weekly to ensure their focus was on the topic at hand and they had time to study the material out of class. A dedicated email helpline was even maintained, in which staff could post questions to the trainer regarding everyday issues they faced in their work.

How can this help me?

If your company has staff who need training in multiple facets of business communications, blended training can be an effective way to meet their many needs. Programs can be designed based on your objectives to simultaneously incorporate both writing and speaking skills whilst taking into consideration the time constraints placed on staff.

Language Key has delivered blended programs for clients in the finance, engineering, shipping, telecommunications, and technology industries and has the experience you need to develop an effective solution to your language training needs.