

Mixed Language Training

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Introduction

Harrison Consulting conducts a wide range of Training Programs throughout the Asia Pacific region. These programs are conducted in English, and in the vast majority of cases, the target audience have sufficient English language skills to benefit fully from the content and skills developed. Generous provision is made, within the program timetable, for group discussion and syndicate work, and for the clarification of issues across language and cultural boundaries.

The workshops described above are typically quite heterogeneous in terms of language ability; up to seven or eight first languages could be represented by the participants on the program. Nonetheless, English, as the business language in the region, is acceptable to most, and we generally achieve high levels of participation and involvement.

Occasionally, however, clients request an approach specific to a particular affiliate or territory in the region, and based on a target audience whose English language ability is limited. Typically, this occurs in training projects in Thailand, Indonesia, Korea, Japan and China.

In such cases, it is judged that the “standard” English language approach that we use in most of our Asia Pacific work, would result in the audience receiving less than 50% of the content and therefore less than 50% achievement of the objectives of the program.

The Traditional Solution

In the past, it has been assumed that in such cases, training must be conducted in the participants’ first language, since their second language skills were not sufficient for full levels of participation and involvement. The solution has often been a Trainer’s Manual, subsequently translated into local language for delivery by local trainers or by the client’s own staff. The following table summarises the comparative benefits of the two approaches.

<i>Direct Training</i>	<i>Train the Trainer</i>
<i>impact</i>	<i>flexibility</i>
<i>quality control</i>	<i>local relevance</i>
<i>professionalism</i>	<i>local language</i>
<i>credibility</i>	<i>local culture</i>
<i>respect</i>	<i>internalises training</i>

It has been largely assumed that these two approaches were mutually exclusive. Clients have often opted for a direct training approach, in spite of the “translation loss”, in the interests of overall impact and respect for the Trainer (particularly important in an Asian context). Some have also had reservations about the calibre of their internal resources to take on the training role.

A New Approach

Harrison Consulting pioneered a new approach to the training of groups with limited English ability, which harnesses the benefits of both of the above approaches. At the heart of this method is a “co-faculty”, comprising one or two of the client’s own staff, fluent both in local language and in English, and well versed in sales and marketing. Co-faculty members are fully briefed before training, and attend all aspects of the training program. A Trainer’s Manual can be provided for them, and their role is as follows:

- overview translation of a whole section to capture the main theme
- translation to generate discussion, and for cultural interpretation
- specific point by point translation of key issues for emphasis and accuracy
- syndicate group facilitation, logistics support and quality control

Formal input sessions are limited to key points, using visual aids with local language translation, and round table discussion in a mixture of English and local language. Syndicate group work and exercises are conducted in local language, with feedback interpreted/translated by co-faculty members.

Skills Practice

Skills practice sessions are best conducted in local language, at least in the early stages. For demonstration purposes, we produce scripts and/or video material which illustrate the “wrong” and “right” way to handle particular situations. Typically, video materials are over-dubbed or subtitled in local language, or scripts can be used for demonstration by senior managers. This can then be critiqued by syndicate teams working in local language and fed back to their colleagues by means of a presentation. Role plays can be conducted within small groups, in the same manner. Materials are sent in advance and are translated for circulation to the participants prior to the workshop.

An Unexpected Bonus

The above “hybrid” approach can effectively harness the benefits of both the direct and train-the-trainer approaches. However, we also discovered a further benefit. Many clients are keen to build the English language skills of their more junior staff, to facilitate regional communication, and build confidence. Invariably we have found that the above approach results in a high level of motivation and an increase in willingness for participants to express themselves in English. Throughout the duration of a two or three day workshop for example, feedback presentations increasingly include English content, and participants support their colleagues when presenting and speaking in English.

Conclusion

The above approach to training for groups of limited English ability harnesses the impact, professionalism and credibility of overseas input, with the need for local flexibility and cultural interpretation. For further information on this approach please contact Harrison Consulting.