

# The smart way of language training



**Training Manager's Diary: "We've been training our employees for five years now. The language school claims that all trainees are progressing, but when we need to send someone to take part in an international project or to make a presentation in English – there's no one to choose from." Read how to avoid this scenario.**

## What can we learn from this?

The majority of entrepreneurs face this kind of problem. It is not surprising that companies lose up to 15% of their business potential due to lack of linguistic competences of their personnel, if they only pay for the language training, instead of managing it effectively. What can be done in order to change this trend? This article is a short guide through the best practices observed for the past nine years among the companies that changed their attitude to language training and chose an well-knit system and training provider, as well as implemented a language audit.

## The idea of in-company language training

It is always worthy to define the most important characteristics of the training. First is the timeframe. Setting up this objective is a real challenge, especially if we take into consideration both the expected results and the trainees' progress, keeping in mind the fact that language proficiency is acquired far more slowly than professional proficiency. The implementation stage is the best moment to define the trainees' starting point and the expected level to be achieved. It is also worth paying attention to available testing tools, independent from the provider of the language training – standardized tests or examinations that monitor the level of language skills at each stage of the training.

Another important characteristic is the training's frequency – depending on the number of trainees, their availability and the budget. Two 90 minute lessons a week is a standard, but this may not be effective for all the trainees. Elementary students should meet their teacher more often, while advanced learners are able to develop their skills on their own. The best solution might be to have classes once a week plus individual work.

Should one provider be chosen and the classes organized in the office or should employees be allowed to choose the training provider on their own? The first solution is more time-consuming for the training department, but on the other hand, there is only one contact person and only one invoice to be settled. This solution works best in companies that need to organize classes for several dozen employees in one location. The second, classes outside the office, works best in companies with many subsidiaries all over the country. However the settlement of costs and the supervision of the training quality would be more complex. Without a clear and unified system of progress verification, it is impossible to achieve set goals. Nowadays, language training is no longer just a benefit for employees. It is an investment that should bring measurable profit for the company, expand business, and build international relationships.

## Rules of participation

Experience of market leaders shows that setting up clear rules of participation in the training, so that they are valued by the trainees, is essential. Their attitude to trainings will be better if they can see that the employer is involved and interested in the results of their training. Therefore, many companies sign agreements with employees that specify the following matters:

- rules of admission to the training – a placement test in order to define the 'starting' level (it is not always profitable to start from elementary level);
- attendance to be controlled (maximum 25% of absences is a reasonable choice);
- budget availability (if employees choose the training provider on their own);
- progress to be achieved after one year and a way of measuring it – the best solution would be an objective testing tool;
- employee's share in the cost of training – many employers cover 100% of costs, but quite often employees share from 10% to 50% of the costs. This practice proves that adults respect the classes more if they contribute to the costs.

## Benchmark of language competences

One does not have to be a language studies graduate in order to manage language training effectively. However, in order to set goals of the training

and monitor its effects, it is worth being aware of recognized standards of language competences assessment. CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for languages) is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe. The CEFR scale describes language competence in foreign languages on six levels: A1 to C2. Employers all over the world expect their employees to be on B2 level, which allows them to communicate freely in their field of specialization.

## Measuring the results: managing not sponsoring

A proper allocation of responsibilities is the key to the success of every project. A language school is the teaching expert, but how can we learn whether trainings improve the language skills of employees? Training providers should not be their own auditor; it is a conflict of interest. Therefore it is necessary to introduce another element – an objective evaluation tool provided by a company or organization that professionally evaluates linguistic competences, and does not teach. Even though it may seem an additional investment, its cost is lower than the cost of the lack of knowledge about the language training provider. This is the only way to receive reliable information and the possibility to manage the entire project effectively.



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