

## Executive Summary

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A Project undertaken for a leading IT firm which aims to nurture business communication skill at junior and middle levels in its Offshore IT Infrastructure Support team - contributing to improvement in business delivery, higher customer satisfaction, overall organizational effectiveness and employee's perception of personal growth.

During discussions the following concerns were highlighted as needing urgent resolution

- The IT Infra support team operated with a team of 60 engineers who provided customer support via mail (90%) & phone to US based clients
- The team, in general, lacked awareness of and sensitivity to the client's cultural nuances and language usage
- There was an influence of mother tongue and Indian cultural contexts in the typical support engineer's English
- The above lead to miscommunication and had potential for serious offense being taken by customers. There were incidents in the past which had led to serious customer dissatisfaction
- As an interim measure, a 'gatekeeper' was appointed to screen all outgoing communication to ensure that was no 'potential dissatisfiers'. This was indicative of the severe nature of the problem being faced.

Further discussions in January 2005 resulted in the following conclusions.

- The roll out of the project proposed to start February 2005, and aimed to close by July 2005. Objective of the project was to create and execute a program which would improve business communication skills, both written & verbal, of this group of employees. The program laid special emphasis on creating an understanding of American culture and language usage and one key output was reduction in customer dissatisfaction due to communication related errors.
- The program was first delivered to the Managers, to ensure their buy-in and further coaching of their team members for skill development.

Accordingly a phase wise deliverables plan was drawn up and implemented. To measure effectiveness of the project, various measures were used:

- Reaction of participants to the training intervention
- Learning of the participants from the training intervention
- On the job implementation - Audits – pre and post training intervention to independently assess the transfer of learning at the workplace.
- Qualitative Feedback – from customers, managers, participants.

## Competency Development Project Plan

Mentor developed a phase wise project plan – details shown below.

| Milestone                       | Execution Details                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Output                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current performance data was captured through sample emails and chats and trouble ticket items.</li> <li>• In depth interviews were conducted with managers.</li> <li>• Problem areas were identified through analysis of data and depth interviews with managers.</li> <li>• Competency chunks that needed addressing were identified for training design</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research document</li> <li>• Role Competency analysis</li> <li>• Training Road Map</li> </ul>                  |
| Training Design                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant Course material – cases, exercises, drills, inputs for reference, etc. were developed.</li> <li>• Trainer presentation material and trainer manual for standardized delivery was also developed.</li> <li>• Testing instrument for assessing pre &amp; post learning changes was developed.</li> </ul>                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courseware</li> <li>• Trainer manual</li> <li>• Presentation material</li> <li>• Testing instrument</li> </ul> |
| Validation                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The developed training material was validated through mock sessions and presentation to managers</li> <li>• Development of test instrument through sample batch of trainees.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validation report</li> </ul>                                                                                   |
| Audit-1                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative measurement of identified Error types on a sample of documents was conducted and an audit report developed.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit Report</li> </ul>                                                                                        |
| Training Delivery for Managers  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of the training program to the identified managers.</li> <li>• Feedback from managers on relevance and design changes required was captured.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback summary</li> <li>• Training report</li> </ul>                                                         |
| Design Corrections              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design changes were made to the training intervention based on the corrective inputs from the managers.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corrected training material</li> </ul>                                                                         |
| Training Delivery for Engineers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The training was delivered to engineers (3 batches of 20 engineers)</li> <li>• An assessment of learning effectiveness through Pre &amp; Post training test scores was done</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback summary</li> <li>• Training report</li> </ul>                                                         |

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Facilitation Session-1 for Engineers                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About 2 weeks post training, on the job facilitation for engineers was done to implement learning (in small groups of 4-5 with one facilitator for 2 hours)</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitation Report</li> </ul>                        |
| Input session for managers based on the observations during facilitation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on observations from the facilitation sessions, inputs were provided to the managers for coaching on the job (2-3 hour session along with templates for coaching)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coaching templates for managers</li> </ul>            |
| Facilitation Session-2 for Engineers                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 weeks post training, on the job facilitation for engineers was conducted to implement learning (typically in small groups of 4-5 with one facilitator for 2 hours)</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitation Report</li> </ul>                        |
| Audit-2                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About 8 weeks post training, final Quantitative measurement of identified Error types on a sample of documents was conducted and the change in scores was noted</li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audit Report</li> <li>Comprehensive Report</li> </ul> |

## Project Phase Details

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A quick summary of each phase is detailed below:

### Research

Research was carried out with the following **objectives**:

- Role played by a typical engineer
- Communication required for the engineer
- Current communication problems faced by the engineer which required addressing through a training intervention.

The following **data was collected**:

- Samples of written documents
- Sit in conference calls / phone calls
- In depth interviews with managers

Based on the data gathered, the following **observations** were made:

- Written Communication was the primary means of communication used by the engineers except the Service Desk team.
- A defect analysis of the sample documents and the in depth interviews resulted in the drawing up of the following hypothesis – Grammar while, being a defect in almost 84% all written communication, was not an issue unless it distorted the message.
- What was seen was that when there were defects of grammar, plus lack of clarity of content plus unclear objective the message was always ineffective.
- This was supported by the effective messages, where, even if grammar was a defect, clear content and well defined objective ensured that the message became effective.

### Recommendations:

- A Training Road Map was drawn up which covered all the components of Written Communication with an emphasis on everyday used grammar.
- The Service Desk Training Road Map incorporated verbal skills components in addition to the written skills.

### Training Design

After the research had identified specific areas for intervention, the Training Road Map was drawn up. This was then fleshed out into a full training intervention and the support material was developed.

The program was a 3 days program. The following were **developed**:

- Participant Course material – cases, exercises, drills, inputs for reference, etc. were developed.
- Trainer presentation material and trainer manual for standardized delivery was also developed.
- Testing instrument for assessing pre & post learning changes was developed.

## Validation

The developed material was presented to the managers and validated with the findings of the research document for relevance and broad design. Feedback was incorporated in the training design.

## Audit 1

A pre intervention audit was conducted to assess the existing skills of the participants in written communication. Random emails, chats, trouble ticket items were collected and they were then analyzed using the Defect Framework.

The Defect Framework lists out a set of defects which could exist in any written document. If there are no defects, then the document is effective. A frequency count of number of defects per document was done to audit the documents.

The findings showed that

- On an average each document contained **3.3 defects**.
- Most of the documents (about 80%) had between 1 to 5 defects.
- The details of defects and the number of documents they were found in are shown below in the table:

| No of Defects | No of documents | As a % of total |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 0             | 6               | 4.5             |
| 1             | 22              | 16.5            |
| 2             | 23              | 17.3            |
| 3             | 20              | 15.0            |
| 4             | 25              | 18.8            |
| 5             | 17              | 12.8            |
| 6             | 11              | 8.3             |
| 7             | 5               | 3.8             |
| 8             | 4               | 3.0             |

- While the average number of defects per document was 3.3, the most frequently seen defect in the sample was in the area of Etiquette.
- Almost 82% of all documents had a defect in the subject line, the salutation or the closing or the document.
- The next defect which was observed in 64% of the documents was grammar.
- Unclear objective of writing the document was the third most frequently found defect at 27%, followed by usage of short forms, local phrases and slang.

## Pilot Training for Managers

The designed training was conducted for the managers across three days.

## Design Corrections

Overall the training design was fine and very minor changes were made to the training program.

## Training Delivery

The training was delivered in 3 batches. The first two batches underwent the Written Communication Module. The last batch, which comprised of Service Desk, underwent a Module which covered both written as well as verbal skills.

Each program lasted three days.

Feedback on Training

### L1 - Reaction Feedback

The participants feedback on the program was an average of **4.2** (5 being Excellent, and 1 being Poor) across all three programs.

The qualitative comments by participants were also very encouraging and showed that the participants felt that the program was useful and easy to implement at work.

### L2 – Learning Feedback

A communication skills instrument was administered to all participants pre and post the training. The change in test scores shows what the learning has been of the participants.

Mentor has an industry average of change in scores. This is a running average of all interventions conducted in similar companies over the past two years.

The three batches pretty much followed the industry average on the scores of each component in the test. The average was above the industry average in all components.

Overall, the three batches showed an average change of **58% versus an average of 52%**. So the learning during the program was above the industry average.

## Facilitation – Round 1

About 2 weeks after the training intervention, the first round of facilitation was conducted for the participants.

The facilitation was conducted for groups of 4 -5 participants over 2 hours. Objective was to reinforce learning from the training intervention and to give individual attention to each participant based on feedback from the training program.

All participants developed individual action plans during the session, based on inputs from the facilitator.

## Input session for managers

Post facilitation, a summary of strengths and opportunity areas of the group's writing skills was made and the following emerged as the top three areas where managerial inputs were needed on an ongoing basis.

- Grammar – 39%
- KISS – 34%
- Etiquette (Signature) – 13%
- Avoiding words (kindly, henceforth) – 11%

This data was further validated by the action plans made by the participants. Recommendations made to the managers for support to improve writing skills:

- Medium / long term classes on improving English language/ grammar
- Communication exercises to focus on etiquette (signature/ subject line)
- Develop and circulate a policy on signature, subject line.

A Coaching Plan was developed by managers. This focused on rolling out exercises for the participants on the identified opportunity areas.

## Facilitation – Round 2

About 5 weeks after the training intervention, the second round of facilitation was conducted for the participants.

The facilitation was conducted for groups of 4 -5 participants over 2 hours. Objective was to review the action plan, see transfer of learning on the job and reinforce knowledge from the training.

## Audit 2

About 8 weeks after the training intervention, Audit 2 was conducted.

Again, samples of written documents were randomly collected and analyzed using the Defect Framework.

The results showed the following:

- On an average each document has 0.34 defects.
- All documents (100%) have between 0-3 defects.
- Out of these **75% documents have zero defects**.
- No document has more than 3 defects.
- The details of defects and the number of documents they were found in are shown below in the table:

| No of Defects | No of documents | As a % of total |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 0             | 83              | 75              |
| 1             | 20              | 18              |
| 2             | 4               | 4               |
| 3             | 3               | 3               |

- While the average number of defects per document was 0.34, the **most frequently seen defect** in the sample was in the area of **Grammar**.
- About **8% of the sample documents have grammar** as a defect.
- **Content and Etiquette are the second** most frequent defects. About **6%** of the sample documents have these two as defects.

## Conclusion

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A look at both quantitative and qualitative data changes highlights the significant changes that are visible in the written skills of the engineers.

### Quantitative Data –

A comparison of both the audits clearly shows the change in skill.

|                                          | Audit 2 | Audit 1 |
|------------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| No of documents audited                  | 110     | 133     |
| Average number of defects per document   | 0.34    | 3.3     |
| No of documents with 0 defects           | 75%     | 4.5%    |
| No of documents with 0 to 3 defects      | 100%    | 48.8%   |
| No of documents with more than 3 defects | 0%      | 46.7%   |

- The overall **defects per document** have come down dramatically from an **average of 3.3 to just 0.34**.
- Over and above a drop in the average, **all documents have less than 3 defects** now versus upto 8 defects in a single document.
- **Grammar** still continues to be the most common defect (though only 8% of documents have it in Audit 2 versus 64% in Audit 1).
- **Etiquette** which was the most common defect in Audit 1 has come down dramatically in terms of actual frequency, but still continues to be the second most common defect in Audit 2. (Audit 1 – 109 documents had the defect versus only 9 documents in Audit 2).

### Qualitative Data -

Overall, the **quantitative measures** show a significant improvement in the quality of written communication by the engineers.

There has been some **qualitative feedback from clients** too – which was conveyed through the on site coordinator about “**emails being crisper**” since the Competency Development Interventions.