
TRENDSETTERS INC. :
CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

A Web-Based Training Needs Analysis Simulation

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PTC 650 – Needs Analysis Simulation
July 27, 2007

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Executive Summary of Results

This report presents the results of a web-based training needs assessment for implementing a cross-cultural communication awareness program for TrendSetters, Inc. After significant success with stores across the United States, TrendSetters has begun a gradual expansion into the global retailing market. TrendSetters is a large organization with multiple corporate offices, distribution centers, and stores throughout the United States and several international locations. Based on the experiences of other U.S. retailers, TrendSetter executives have requested that all employees involved with any international business should receive training in cross-cultural communication awareness and business etiquette..

The corporate training department has been contacted by the human resources department to initiate development of this program. Before moving ahead and teaming with the programming department, an analysis of the target audience and environment were conducted. Along with interview with senior executives, employee feedback was gathered through a survey.

Results support the development of a W/EPSS program that offers country specific information. In addition to just presenting information for memorization, this training program will give employee learners an opportunity to apply their new skills by analyzing brief case study scenarios and identifying communication errors.

Analysis Technique

In order to properly define the need for training, whether web-based training is appropriate, and which method will be necessary, the needs assessment was conducted using both interview and questionnaire techniques.

Interviews

Email and phone interviews were conducted with eight TrendSetter senior executives to frame an overall picture of the need for educating employees in international business etiquette, as well as expectations of a training program. This information would help determine whether a WBT would satisfy need, or if another training avenue such as traditional group seminars or external source be considered. The following issues were discussed:

- Why do you feel that TrendSetters should implement a cross-cultural communication training program?
- Do you feel that international and cultural communication issues have resulted in specific problems within your organization? If so, what?
- In what countries or regions do you anticipate future expansion?
- What types of skills do you expect your employees to apply in their relationships with international counterparts? Are there specific scenarios of concern?
- Do you have a timeframe for program implementation or deadline for employee education?
- Will employees be given an opportunity to conduct training, uninterrupted, during the regular business day or do you imagine this being an added responsibility?

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- Will a budget and manpower be allocated to maintain this training system once initial implementation is complete?
 - Do you foresee TrendSetter international counterparts participating in similar training?

Questionnaire

Senior management identified those departments which participate in international activities within the organization. With assistance from the human resources department, targeted employees in the marketing, media relations, purchasing, distribution, finance, and information systems were requested, via email, to participate in an online survey. The survey was produced using the online survey service, QuestionPro and gathered employee feedback about the following:

- Personal attitudes towards communication issues in international business relationships
- Experiences while conducting business with international counterparts
- Use of technology at home, office, and travel locations

Audience Analysis

Demographics

The target audience for this training includes 150 marketing, media relations, purchasing, distribution, finance, and information systems Trendsetter employees involved with international operations. These employees conduct international business by traveling, email, phone, and videoconference.

Topic Knowledge

Currently, it is not required that these employees be fluent in any language other than English or receive any formal cross-cultural or country specific training. All respondents agreed that TrendSetter did not provide training. Fifty percent of those who travel internationally have independently researched basic business etiquette (such as greetings) prior to departure. Twenty-eight percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that lack of cultural knowledge has resulted in an embarrassing or uncomfortable situation.

Aptitude for Computer-Based Learning

All members of the target training audience are experienced computer users, and are familiar with the TrendSetters network and web site. Although not all employees reported previous experience with occupational web-based training, no one should experience any technical difficulties.

Environment Analysis

Locations

Trendsetter employees involved in international operations are located in multiple locations across the United States. In addition to the primary corporate headquarters in New York City, distribution and purchasing centers are located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Bakersfield, California. A small European regional headquarters is located in London, England. International retail stores are located in Canada, England, Germany, and France. TrendSetters is currently in the process of establishing operations in Asia. At this time retail stores located throughout the United States are not a consideration factor for this analysis.

Technical Environment

The entire TrendSetter organization operates in an IBM compatible MS Windows environment with high speed internet access. This includes existing North American and European international locations.

All employees that participate in international operations have a dedicated computer and office space (either cubicle or office). Traveling employees are supplied an IBM compatible laptop computer. Based on the results of the employee questionnaire, most employees use IBM compatible computers with high speed internet access in their homes

Web-Based Training Method Recommendation

Results of this needs analysis support the request of TrendSetter executives to implement a web-based cross cultural communication training program for corporate employees involved in international operation. **W/EPSS (Web/Electronic Performance Support System)** is the recommended web-based training method. The training program should be offered as a link from the employee resource page (restricted access) of the TrendSetters corporate web site, which will allow for 24/7 access by all employees worldwide (provided they can secure internet access.). It is important to note that foreign language instruction will not be a component of this training package, with exception of specific instances that pertain to complex greetings etiquette. Although many employees did indicate a need for an in-house WBT language tutorial, this report recommends that need be addressed separately.

Justification for W/EPSS Selection – Advantages/Feature Considerations

TrendSetter employees involved in international operations have independent schedules and require flexibility for “just in time” training. In addition, W/EPSS will allow employees to select specific modules and country information as needed, thus creating a more customized and efficient training experience. Although there is basic, factual information to be learned, the W/EPSS system will handle employee need to problem solve complex business communication scenarios that can result in multiple solutions. Judged interactions will be used to reinforce learning, while allowing the employees to draw from the previous experiences working with international counterparts. The system should also offer several asynchronous options, including links to resources and an employee blog.

Justification for W/EPSS Selection - Instructional Design Considerations

Determining the appropriate training method for teaching sensitivity towards and application of cross-cultural communication skills requires a review of Gagne's five learned capabilities. Feedback from employee questionnaires indicated that knowing basic rules of cultural etiquette is only a piece of the puzzle. More often, employees find themselves caught off guard during a meeting or other interaction that requires quick thinking and recall of many aspects of cultural awareness. By utilizing instructional design that addresses the intellectual capabilities of application and analysis, TrendSetter employees will be able to first be presented principles of international business etiquette, and then follow a path of guided discovery using short, country specific case study examples to practice applying the etiquette rules in a realistic situation.

Goal Statement

It is the recommendation of this report that Trendsetters, Inc. establishes a cross-cultural communication education program that offers on-demand information categorized by country. In order to define the goals of this program and to establish a method for measuring program performance, an initial goal statement has been written.

Given a written statement, the learner demonstrates ability to analyze a scenario and select errors in cross-cultural communication.

Conclusion

As the result of a needs assessment, this report recommends that a W/EPSS cross-cultural communication training program will benefit employees of the Trendsetter, Inc. organization. Assessment included interviews with senior executives, an employee survey, and environmental analysis. With computers and internet access available to all members of the computer-literate target audience, web-based training is an excellent option for delivering training. In addition to the presentation of content, the program should give employees an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to apply their new knowledge to a realistic scenario.

Appendix A: Employee Questionnaire

Introduction

TrendSetters, Inc. is in the process of developing an in-house web-based training program to support our employees who participate in international operations. This program will provide you a valuable resource for learning country specific business etiquette and improving our cross-cultural communication. Please take a few moments and complete the following survey. Your feedback will be used to desing a program that provides maximum assistance to you and other TrendSetter employees.

1. In which department are you employed?

Human Resources	Marketing	Finance	Information Systems	Other
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2. Does your job currently require international travel?

Yes	No
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3. If you travel internationally, is your business conducted in more than one country?

Yes	No
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4. What countries or regions do you travel to for TrendSetter?

Canada	England	Germany	France	Asia	Other
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5. Language barriers cause difficulty when I conduct international business.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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6. Cultural differences cause difficulty when I conduct international business.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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7. I have been well-educated by Trendsetter concerning cross-cultural communication concerns prior traveling abroad.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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8. I have independently researched local business customs and etiquette prior to traveling abroad.

Yes	No
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9. Lack of cultural knowledge has resulted in an embarrassing or uncomfortable situation between me and an international colleague.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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10. During international meetings and social functions, I continue to adapt to cultural differences throughout the event (rather than just the initial greeting).

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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11. When traveling internationally, do you conduct business from locations other than TrendSetter facilities (such as hotels)?

Yes	No
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12. Have you ever participated in a web-based training program through an employer?

Yes	No
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13. Do you access the TrendSetter web site from your home computer?

Yes	No
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14. Do you have high speed internet access at home?

Yes	No
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15. Please explain any situation where cross-cultural communication has caused a difficulty for you when conducting business internationally.

16. Please explain the types of business customs and sources you researched independently prior to traveling abroad.

17. If you have previous experience with an occupational web-based training program, please share any positive or negative aspects of the experience.

18. What information would you like to see included in this training program?

Thank you for your time and effort completing our survey. Your input is valuable as we develop a web-based training program to assist you and your fellow employees improve communication with our global colleagues.