

TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES (TCS): Meeting International Business Needs with Intensive Language Training

The Situation

With an impressive \$16.5 billion in revenue in 2015, TCS, which has more than 350,000 employees worldwide, is a leader in providing IT consulting and business solutions. TCS' reach spans clients in 46 countries. Certainly, consultants who can communicate in multiple languages and work well across cultures are a valuable asset to TCS.

CEO Natarajan Chandrasekaran recognizes how a learning culture helps his organization stay competitive in the rapidly changing global business environment. The talent development team, led by the vice president and global head for talent development, Damodar Padhi, provides employees with “anytime, anywhere” access to learning, including language instruction, through asynchronous courses and routinely encourages employees to obtain certifications and take ownership of their own learning goals.

In 2014, TCS confronted a new challenge as its business expanded quickly in France. Consultants working with French clients struggled to communicate key issues and

maintain relationships. These problems arose because clients were more comfortable conversing in French, and most of the consultants working with them did not speak much French, despite having business and IT expertise.

Because the consultants were already working on active projects, any language training had to be deployed rapidly and would need to be intensive and include live instructor-led lessons. Recognizing this, the Culture and Language Initiatives (CLI) team, led by Dolon Gupta, launched a major performance initiative, The French Connexion. The goal of the program was to quickly train consultants to conduct effective business conversations in French, which would improve not only the efficiency of their work, but also clients' comfort level, loyalty, and satisfaction.

Collaborating for Success

In planning, designing, and deploying the program, Gupta worked with multiple internal and external partners including educational institutions, internal business units, internal resource groups, and deployment teams. Alliance Francaise, a critical partner during the planning period, is a well-known international educational organization dedicated to providing French language classes. Alliance Francaise's lengthy experience (over a century) with providing French instruction proved invaluable as the organization worked with Gupta and her team to design a customized business French course suited for the needs of TCS' consultants.

French Connexion

With consulting engagements already occurring in France, the team understood the need to develop consultants' language skills quickly. An intensive 400-hour course spread over a period of four months was designed. The course incorporated multiple delivery methods, including face-to-face instructor-led sessions, e-learning courses with gamification elements, and print materials.

In 2014, 112 candidates were selected for the program. They quickly immersed themselves in live classroom sessions at an Alliance Francaise location for six hours a day, five days a week. The students completed activities using French business textbooks in addition to customized materials.

Not all learners were able to keep up with the rapid material delivery; therefore, slower learners' challenges were identified at the individual level and analyzed. Internal language experts of TCS created personalized supplemental content, which was delivered through webinar sessions for these participants.

After completing four months of this intensive training, participants began preparing to take the final exam: the Diplôme D'études en Langue Française (DELF) international examination for French, which is administered by France's Ministry of Education. The exam is for individuals who are not native speakers and tests listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. E-learning content was developed internally to prepare participants for this test. The e-learning content consisted of 20 games that tested various aspects of language skill attainment.

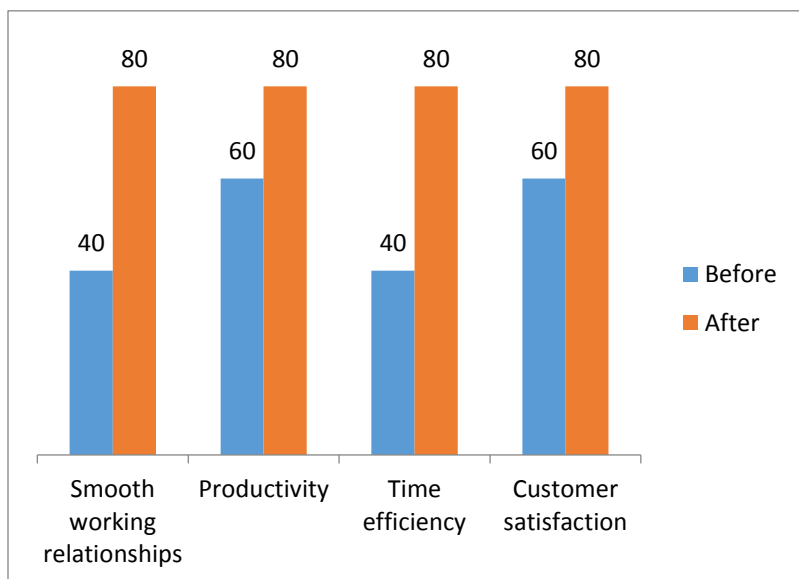
TCS is part of the minority in including gamification elements in learning programs (only about a quarter of organizations have introduced [gamification](#)). However, more organizations should follow TCS and other early adopters and consider gamification. The ATD and Institute for Corporate Productivity research report *Playing to Win: Gamification and Serious Games in Organizational Learning* found that about half of all learners who used gamification believed it improved their learning outcomes.

The Results

Of the 112 consultants in French Connexion, 109 passed the final exam. Next, 70 percent of those who passed were assigned to consulting projects for French clients, with impressive results. French clients were much more satisfied and projects proceeded with more efficiency, because less time was spent dealing with communication challenges.

Compared with data collected

before the program, feedback from internal stakeholders and customers on a scale of 0 to 100 demonstrated (Figure 1):



- 40 point improvement in smooth working relationships between consultants and French clients
- 20 point improvement in productivity
- 40 point improvement in time efficiency
- 20 point improvement in customer satisfaction.

The tremendous success of the program was acknowledged by the country head for TCS in France and Tata's language immersion programs have grown as its global business expands. As of 2016, 72 associates around the world are taking more than 700 hours of similar coursework in skills related to other languages and cultural competencies.

Lessons Learned

- Partner with institutions that specialize in language instruction to help design programs related to language skills. Smaller talent development departments may seek to partner with individuals looking for pro bono work rather than organizations.
- When moving into a new market, provide training on language skills. Domestic organizations may consider looking at state, regional, or district-level challenges and consider if there are groups that are struggling to communicate with each other or work together effectively and investing in communication skills training.
- Provide customized learning for participants struggling to keep pace with course speed. Assess why these individuals are falling behind and provide supplemental course materials tailored to their needs.
- Embed gamification elements into an intensive program to combat fatigue, improve engagement and motivation, and promote retention of knowledge.

Additional ATD Resources

- [“Culture Savvy: Working and Collaborating Across the Globe”](#)
- [Global Trends in Talent Development](#)
- [“Language Barriers in the Workplace”](#)
- [Playing to Win: Gamification and Serious Games in Organizational Learning](#)
- [“The Art and Skill of Collaborative Leadership”](#)

Submit Your Story

Can you tell us about a challenge your talent development function faced, a solution your team implemented, a program your team created, and the results your organization has seen? Organizations of all sizes are encouraged to apply. [Submit](#) your story today!

References

American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). 2014. *Playing to Win: Gamification and Serious Games in Organizational Learning*. Alexandria, VA. ASTD Press.

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