



Why run international sales training?

For a long time, sales training was largely a local affair. But during the course of globalisation, more and more companies began to run international sales training programmes. So is this a trend which will peter out after a time or rather a significant strategic initiative offering new opportunities to conduct sales at a higher level?

Implementing a global sales strategy

Internationally active customers and key accounts should and must be approached with an uniform sales approach. Nowadays, products and services are largely internationally focused and will be sold in different countries to similar target groups using the same sales arguments. If a standardised sales terminology and process is adopted, it is easier to communicate and successfully implement central marketing and added value concepts for individual products and customer groups as well as proven models, tried-and-trusted approaches and relevant information.

„Some countries are often mistrustful of international training programmes.“

Only an internationally standardised training programme guarantees this. Everyone involved in the sales (and marketing) process speaks the same ‘language’, understands the marketing strategies better and can communicate important information in a faster and more targeted manner. Isolated locally-based training measures cannot meet these requirements and are therefore only suitable for basic skills at best (e.g. communication, time management).

The challenges of international sales training

Of course, there are still lots of customers which operate on a purely local level and in certain countries, different distribution channels and market positions often need to be taken into account such as cultural differences and particular language features. The design and implementation need to meet the highest of standards in order for international sales training to become fully effective. The most important aspects are detailed below.

This specifically means: the objectives and any significant content should be agreed in advance of the training programme. During the course of a scoping meeting and/or the entry point research, the various local features must be made clear to the training provider in addition to the international strategy to ensure that all of this is taken into account in the programme design. A typical standard training programme ('off the shelf') is no longer able to meet this basic requirement. Every international training concept should therefore be tailored precisely to the company's specific situation as well as having



International as well as country-specific: 'glocalisation'.

Some countries are often mistrustful of international training programmes. Local training has already taken place and there is a concern that insufficient attention will be paid to local characteristics. There is also a general skepticism towards anything issued by the central headquarters. The result: official agreement to undertake training is often a matter of simply paying lip service and participants only go about this half-heartedly, sometimes waiting for a 'pre-determined break point' so that they can quit the training altogether.

It is of critical importance to involve the relevant countries or regions in the training concept at an early stage.

pre-defined scope for any additional adaptation to specific regional characteristics (localisation).

This scope may relate to the sales process (e.g. gaining new customers or potential exploitation/cross-selling with existing customers), distribution channels (e.g. sales via dealers or direct sales), the selection of target customers or product focus and local best practices. When it comes to designing training programmes, this affects participant preparatory tasks as well as case studies, exercises and role play scenarios.

From experience, the amount of effort needed to adapt the training modules or learning pathways to suit local conditions stands at approx. 20-30%.

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In the local language

Cultural characteristics should not be underestimated. While the basic concepts for discussion may be comparable, there may be substantial differences between countries and regions in the way in which they are implemented. Even if the internal company language is English, the training should still be carried out by native speakers who live in the relevant countries or regions and have knowledge of the local sales culture and local language.

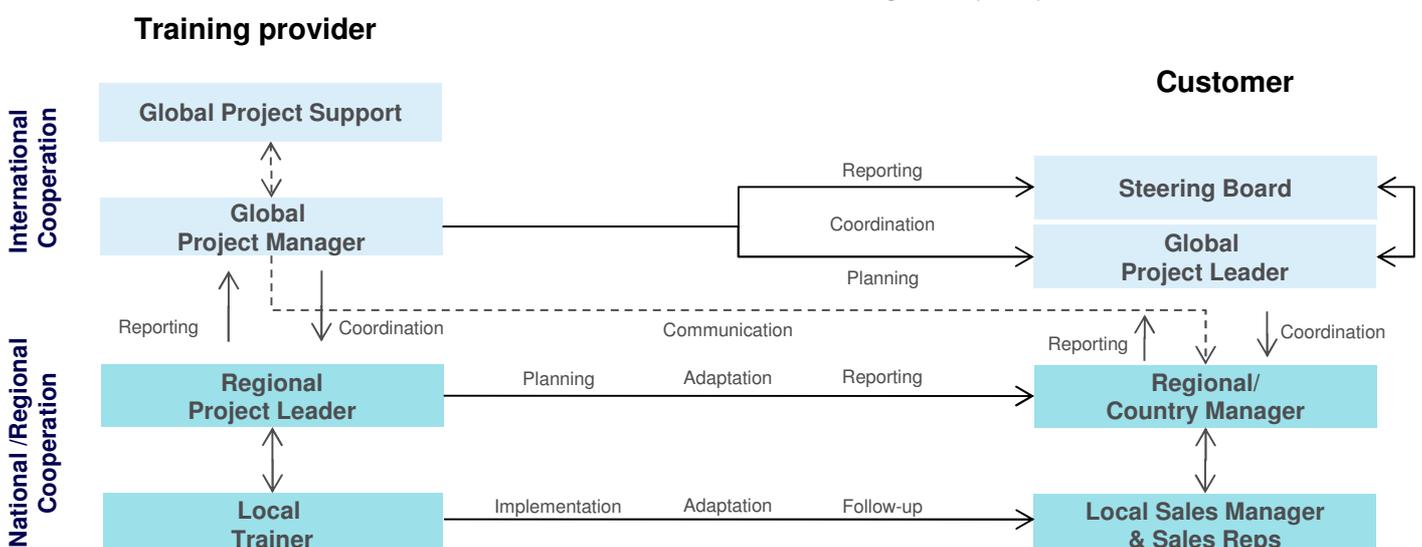
Project organisation

An international training initiative also needs special project management within companies. When it comes to an international academy programme offering different qualification modules, project management should be introduced for the design phase until the management of the academy is embedded within the existing organisational structure. Project management is also required for the entire project duration in cases of fundamental changes being made to the working method or strategic

initiatives (e.g. from the sale of products to solutions or special programmes for new customers) where there is substantial focus on implementation.

„An international training initiative also needs special project management within companies.“

In addition to devising the timetable and coordinating the individual stages of work, the project management should also put together an international project group to represent each of the relevant regions from the outset and integrate their requirements into the project. The project group also acts as a sparring partner for the training provider in terms of the detailed design of the individual training modules and learning pathways. When it comes to implementing the training, the individual project group members organise the roll-out and coordinate collaboration in the countries/regions (e.g. with localisation of the modules). The training provider should reflect this organisation and put together a project team with a central project manager, central design team and regional (lead) trainers.



Requirements of the training provider

There is a wide range of sales trainers in each country. Most work as so-called 'lone-fighters'. Sometimes they belong to a trainer network which has international members but usually does not have an international organizational structure. These networks award individual training contracts to their members in exchange for commission. This means that there is often a lack of ongoing collaboration and most trainers do not know one another. The conditions for creating standardized international training are therefore extremely difficult.

The same also applies to local training institutes which occasionally collaborate with cooperation partners abroad. Here too there is a lack of the basic structures and expertise needed for successful global implementation.

„Local training institutes do not have the necessary basic structures for a global Implementation.“

Very few training providers have a global organisation with their own branches and trainers and experience of successfully implementing numerous international training projects. But this organisational backbone is one of the key prerequisites for successful training. Numerous independent trainers or local training organisations are good if they want to conduct their own existing training. Content and personality are closely interlinked. But they fail if they are required to implement an 'unfamiliar' training concept. Good trainers also need to

learn to stick to the specifications and integrate country-specific characteristics without losing sight of the original learning objective (implementation of a strategic initiative, changing behavior etc.) and while integrating their own personality.



This requires a suitable dose of self-discipline which independent networks often do not require. There needs to be appropriate experience and established processes to enable the trainers to be integrated into the overall process (e.g. briefing, localisation). There should also be established structures for the management of internal processes (e.g. reporting of local activities). This includes the design and printing/sending out of documents, quality control processes and the provision of feedback about the training process to the customer headquarters.

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Budget planning

International training programmes are more effective but not cheaper than the sum total of local initiatives. Of course there are synergy effects, such as with the design of the training programme which only needs to be carried out once at a central level without the need for the individual design of each parallel module. On the other hand, these synergy effects are generally balanced out by higher implementation costs because qualified trainers and cross-divisional coordination are required.

Most companies do not want to operate all their accounting centrally and want to allow the various countries to play a role, at least as far as implementation costs are concerned. Good training providers should therefore also be able to offer flexible accounting for services to enable the optimal mix of local and central invoice settlement. This avoids any unnecessary charges eating into the budget such as 'withholding tax' or other such fiscal peculiarities. Internationally active providers have a substantial advantage here because they have 'legal entities' in various countries and can therefore support the optimal mix of local and central accounting.

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Summary

International sales training programmes generate a high 'return on training' in particular where the high level of design and implementation specifications can be suitably adhered to and local characteristics taken into account, such as the central strategy. This enables each individual participant to perceive the training programme as 'his' or 'her' programme rather than as a typical measure issued by the central headquarters which they hope will be over quickly.

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