



Success Stories

Developing Skills
for Employability with
German Partners

8 Case Studies of
Soft Skills Training



TRAINING – MADE IN GERMANY

Success Stories

Developing Skills for Employability with German Partners

8 Case Studies from the Sector of Soft Skills Training

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Preface

In addition to job-related competencies and technical qualifications, soft skills play an important role not only for workplace advancement, but also for long-term career growth. The term “soft skills” refers to a set of interpersonal competencies and attributes that permit a person to successfully cooperate with others, to identify goals and issues and to plan and achieve creative responses to problems. Employees who are equipped with well-trained soft skills are attributed a decisive competitive advantage by their employers. Therefore, the transmission and development of the so-called soft skills are of critical importance not only to the success of individuals, but also of companies worldwide.

Even though they are often intangible and difficult to quantify in comparison with hard or technical skills, soft skills contribute to employee productivity, positive work environment and improved customer service and drive innovation and organizational success. Essential soft skills include effective communication, teamwork, active listening, leadership/empathy, critical thinking/problem solving and time management. Numerous training providers of the iMOVE network engage in conveying methodological, social and personal competencies across occupational boundaries.

Germany’s economic success is reinforced by its expertise in vocational education and training [VET] and its dual training system. Germany has a long-standing tradition in this field and enjoys a high reputation for the demand-driven and prac-

tical orientation of its qualification programmes. Cooperation is particularly successful since this German experience is adapted time and time again to the specific needs of each individual case. The integration of professional, social and methodological competencies is at the forefront of what German partners can provide for you.

iMOVE was established as an initiative by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in 2001 in order to promote private sector cooperation of German training providers with international public and private organisations. iMOVE services include a database which contains information about German training providers, seminars, trainings and trade fairs abroad as well as a B2B marketplace, where specific international requests can be spread to iMOVE’s provider network.

This brochure highlights eight success stories of soft skills training, realised in a joint effort by German and international partners. With its wide range of training programmes and its strong emphasis on employability, “Training – Made in Germany” has the potential to successfully contribute to the design process of training systems in many countries through transnational cooperation projects.

Not convinced yet? Have a look for yourself in the following best practice examples and be inspired!



Dr. Andreas Werner (Universidade de São Paulo, Brasilien)
Head of Division iMOVE at the BIBB





Soft skills make companies more attractive and successful

Effective soft skills training for employees makes the difference between a successful and a very successful company. A shortage of skilled labour, demographic change, complex requirements, a fast pace, uncertainty – all these factors have greatly increased the pressure on companies to find good employees. Such employees are the number one competitive advantage in many industries and the future of the company depends on them. Companies thus compete fiercely for the best minds. The required soft skills – especially those of middle and senior managers – play a decisive role in determining whether the company is attractive to potential candidates or current employees.

CONSULTANT-NET offers a wide range of soft skills training courses for international customers, for example from the automotive industry (including trucks), construction, engineering, agriculture and pharmaceuticals. A good mix of soft skills, professional knowledge and technical skills is particularly important to clients.

CONSULTANT-NET training is always interactive and practice-oriented. A variety of methods are used, such as case studies that are practised in role plays with video analysis, where three participants form a team and each takes on the role of camera operator, employee and manager in turn.

Group exercises and discussions give participants the opportunity to practise their skills in a real-life context and receive feedback. One example of soft skills training offered by CONSULTANT-NET is a workshop on “Effective communication and teamwork”. In this training, participants learn how to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts and work together synergistically to achieve their common goals.

While traditional topics such as communication, teamwork and leadership are still in demand, CONSULTANT-NET is seeing increasing demand for training on agile working methods, intercultural communication and digital competence in the age of digitalisation and global networking. There are other key trends. In the face of advancing automation and technological change

[catchwords: ChatGPT and AI], skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving expertise and creativity are becoming increasingly valuable. Emotional intelligence, flexibility and the ability to collaborate virtually are also gaining in importance in an increasingly globalised and digitalised working world. More and more companies and employees are focussing on developing and strengthening these soft skills in order to meet future requirements.

CONSULTANT-NET has three regional focuses. In Europe, the company is primarily active in Switzerland, Austria and Germany. The second major focus is on the Arab countries – especially the Middle East and the Maghreb states. The third focus is on all other francophone countries, including France. One reason for this is the geographical proximity and cultural affinity of these countries – the CONSULTANT-NET team has an international presence, which facilitates market access and customer relations. In addition, these countries are known for their strong economies and their great potential for business development and investment.

If used at the right point in the learning path, online training courses can have a very positive impact. Used sensibly, for example in a ratio of 50 percent face-to-face to 50 percent online, they enable participants to take part in training courses and enhance their soft skills regardless of their location. CONSULTANT-NET also utilises interactive online meeting platforms to offer participants an interactive learning experience and promote exchange and collaboration.

Universal soft skills with varying characteristics

Most companies have now come to realise that managers need specific leadership skills in order to be successful. In many countries, though, promotions to management positions are still often based solely on expertise and professional experience. Quite often, these factors even take second place to the networks you are part of, i.e. the connections you have. The result of appointing managers in this way is that many are not very successful. Employees become unproductive or even demotivated.

Cultural differences play a major role in determining exactly what leadership skills are needed. DEX Training & Consulting has implemented management development programmes in various countries, including Australia, Brazil, the DACH countries, Ireland, Russia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the UK and the USA. There, it has become clear that people interact with one another in very different ways. Different people find different skills important, attach different meanings to the same words and emphasise different behaviour patterns.

In Germany and Austria, for example, professional competence is a key factor for a manager's credibility. In Australia, friendly interaction on an equal footing is a prerequisite for their acceptance. And in Brazil, it is an interest in the private and emotional lives of employees that promotes trust in the manager. It is essential that this is taken into account when implementing programmes for managers in different countries.

The most important thing is to learn how a specific culture generally ticks. However, it is not only the culture of the country, but above all the corporate culture that influences people's values, perceptions and behaviour. This applies in particular to managers, as they are – in more or less visible positions – representatives of their companies.

Interviews as the basis for customised programmes

DEX Training & Consulting usually conducts semi-structured interviews with participants before a programme even begins. "Semi-structured" means that, although the same questions are

asked of everyone, these questions are so open that there are a wide range of possible answers. The interviewees can explain how they see things and divulge something about themselves. This provides plenty of information about what values and expectations of managers are deemed essential in the company and which of them are actually practised in everyday life.

The interview results then show what attitudes and behaviour patterns are used to judge how competent managers are. This enables DEX Training & Consulting to tailor its programmes specifically to the country, the company and the participants concerned.

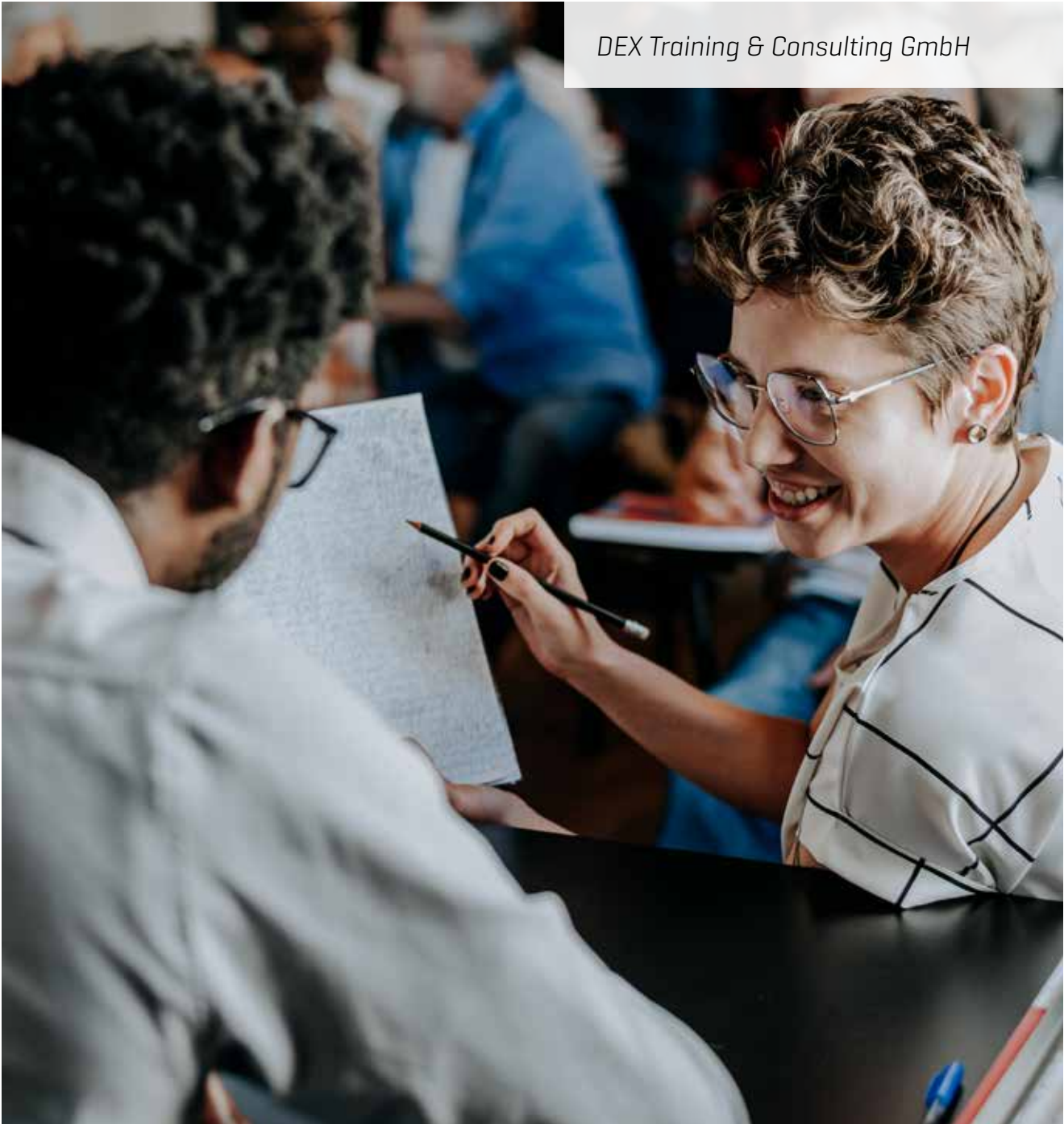
However, "tailoring" also means that the basic leadership skills are always the same:

Managers need soft skills that

- build trust between people
- underpin their function as a role model
- strengthen communication with employees, colleagues and their own superiors

Trust, role model function, communication – and attitude

How trust is built differs greatly from country to country – and sometimes even from one region to another. In all cultures, however, being a role model means doing what you expect your own employees to do. Doing anything else undermines trust. Above all, being a role model means being consistent, in other words practising what you preach! If you expect punctuality, you have to be punctual yourself. In the case of a more authoritarian management style, you have to formulate instructions completely clearly if you expect them to be followed. If you adopt a cooperative management style and want employees to get involved and take on responsibility, you have to give them the freedom they need and accept the risk that things might not always turn out as hoped. In any case, being a role model is not tied to a specific leadership style.



Good communication with employees, among colleagues and with respect to your own superior forms the basis for the two leadership skills of “building trust” and “being a role model”. What is considered “good” varies greatly and is substantially influenced by national and corporate culture, which often gives rise to very specific expectations of communication.

What all managers really need, regardless of the culture in which they operate, is the ability to understand other perspec-

tives. And that is primarily a question of attitude: you need to be genuinely interested in what motivates others, what they want to say or why they have a different opinion. If this is not the case, even the best “active listening” skills are useless. Only a genuine interest in achieving something for others and wanting to “take them on the journey” will make a manager successful in the long term.

New mindsets and skillsets for the future of vocational training

The networked, knowledge-based and highly technologised world of work requires a rising number of interpersonal skills while at the same time increasing the opportunities for outsourcing hard skills. More reproducible knowledge can be outsourced to artificial intelligence and other technologies in the future. Merely “cramming” facts that can be tested is no longer a sound educational strategy and will become completely obsolete in the future. The same will apply to professions that predominantly involve uniform activities. In addition to traditional industrial professions, this will particularly also affect administrative and accounting activities.

However, specialist expertise will still be urgently needed. Certain sectors such as agriculture or the skilled trades will experience a renaissance in the course of the sustainability transformation. And there will be new occupational profiles where the expertise required will explicitly be soft skills. In this respect, the concepts of hard skills and soft skills will also increasingly merge.

Soft skills play a decisive role when it comes to leading people. At the moment, these skills are only taught at a certain career level or degree of seniority. However, it would be an advantage for all employees to benefit from learning about leadership, ideally even at school and during training. Appropriate training can enable participants to better understand their superiors and thus lead “from below”.

The name of the company Collective Leadership Institute also describes its central concept. It’s about the ability of the individual – even without formal leadership responsibility – to lead others and at the same time be led by the surrounding system [team, organisation, stakeholders]. On the one hand, this understanding of the system sharpens the view of the big picture. On the other hand, it improves self-efficacy and the ability to work together as partners, which is a key skill for the major issue of sustainability.

The collective leadership courses are either attended by individuals who operate in complex multi-stakeholder systems, or the training provider brings training and technical expertise directly into these systems through projects. This is taking place in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) laid out in the UN 2030 Agenda. Initial and continuing vocational education and training [anchored in SDG 4], for example, is one of the oldest multi-stakeholder systems, as it brings together actors from the private sector [companies, employers’ organisations] with the public sector [government agencies, schools] and civil society [students, trade unions].

Although the weighting of the stakeholders varies from country to country, and this in turn plays a role in determining the performance of the respective vocational education and training system, the basic structure is very similar in most countries. This enables the Collective Leadership Institute to contribute its expertise, which lies primarily in increasing efficiency through better partnerships at the interfaces, worldwide through methodological training courses and process support.

In addition to a skillset, this also requires a mindset that makes the new methods possible, meaning that formal hierarchies are pushed into the background to a certain extent while issues such as power, control, status, etc. need to be renegotiated. In the long term, people can work more efficiently and effectively in a less hierarchical system. The same is equally true at an individual and social level. Methodological support, such as that offered by the Collective Leadership Institute, is essential for this to actually succeed in organisations and companies.

*Collective Leadership
Institute gGmbH*



Untying communicative knots

Since 2000, clearentrance® has been supporting organisations and their people around the world with organisational development and team coaching to help them rise to the constant changes of our time in a relaxed and mentally flexible manner and work together constructively and productively despite all the diversity.

Team coaching and train-the-trainer courses

Team coaching is one of the focal points of the company's work. Triggered, for example, by upcoming change processes, reorganisations or newly formed teams, unresolved communication problems often play a role. Some of the reasons for this are virtual distance, lack of confidence to speak one's mind openly or simply a lack of solutions. On top of this, everyone in the team speaks different languages – and by that we don't mean national languages. To take one example, what a business economist understands by "process" is not the same as what an engineer associates with the word. The different professional worlds alone make communication difficult. This can be resolved – provided that all parties involved are prepared to make a greater effort to communicate. Innovation requires friction and the team coaching sessions are about coming to a common understanding of the problem, the goal and the effort required to achieve the goal.

Train-the-trainer courses are all about enabling trainees to [re]discover the joy of learning. The prospective trainers learn about and train all the relevant skills that are needed here – beyond specialist expertise. This includes, for example, role awareness, self-image, group dynamics and teaching methods. At the same time, the participants also become aware of cultural differences and their own stereotypes.

Process and practice orientation

Clear entrance® is process- and practice-orientated. Creative methods [e.g. games, group dynamic exercises, collegial case consultations] can be very effective in developing new perspectives, untying communicative knots and bringing the participants closer together [again]. In this way, the groups get to the

heart of their concerns and achieve the desired results through experience. The success – or failure – of the collaboration thus becomes clearly visible to everyone. The experience gained is reflected upon and transferred to the professional context.

Working across spatial, temporal and cultural boundaries is now commonplace for many organisations and teams, a development that is being driven by the increasing internationalisation of the economy and high technology standards. At the same time, the diverse nature of working groups and teams is considered to be one of the greatest challenges in international competition.

For example, a cultural change sought by a global insurance group was the reason for an event in Hong Kong attended by all business units. In the context of this event, clear entrance® was given the task of supporting one of the units, a multicultural team [Scotland, France, Germany, UK, Finland], in identifying specific misunderstandings in the workplace [they called them "elephants in the room"], addressing them and using the findings to ensure transparent and constructive interaction in the future.

The clarification of views on the situation and the team, the open discussion, new goals and the agreements supported by everyone meant that the team was mentally and emotionally able to engage openly with the forthcoming cultural change. One key realisation was self-efficacy: how valuable it is to address misunderstandings and tensions at an early stage and how each individual can contribute to refocusing attention on the essentials, on the team's mission.

Management development

The management development programmes at clear entrance® usually focus on clarifying one's own role and the requirements for future leadership. Managers particularly value the exchange of experiences, as well as the opportunity to reflect on decisions and their actions in specific situations and to share new perspectives and/or solutions with their colleagues.

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Coaching skills can provide valuable support in mastering the numerous leadership challenges. One essential task in leadership today is to let go and foster personal initiative, personal responsibility and self-organisation – things that are not only highly valued in coaching, but can also be promoted very well through coaching.

Individual one-to-one coaching sessions are also part of the services that clear entrance® offers to support people in leadership positions. The issues addressed include, for example, an assessment of one's own leadership role or very specific questions relating to collaboration with employees and teams.

One client from an international company came to clear entrance® for coaching with the aim of working on his emotional intelligence. He had failed an assessment centre, which was a

prerequisite for a higher position. The feedback from the observers revealed that his failure had less to do with his professional competence; instead, his communication behaviour was seen as the "sticking point". He was said to display a lack of empathy in employee appraisals, and place a too one-sided emphasis on facts and his own position. Through coaching, the client developed an awareness of his actions and how they affect others, learnt to recognise and accept his emotions and developed new ways of communicating in order to get through to his employees while at the same time remaining true to himself and his cultural values.

Soft skills training in the metaverse

In the age of globalisation and digital technologies, revolutionary opportunities are opening up for companies. Virtual learning spaces – better known as metaverses – are an up-and-coming trend that is reshaping the way employees learn and train.

The metaverse will play a pioneering role in the future world of work by offering innovative, personalised and efficient learning formats. The resulting paradigm shift in education has the potential to solve major challenges. As a new learning space in the world of work 4.0, the metaverse offers the opportunity to make training more efficient and scalable by overcoming traditional limitations such as spatial resources and physical presence. Here, employees can interact with photorealistic avatars in realistic scenarios and practise mastering cultural challenges. The immersive technology enables employees to perceive themselves as real in the virtual environment, which increases the transfer of learning. Overcoming time and space constraints also makes it possible to achieve efficient and scalable training for a large group of employees.

The potential to promote employees' intercultural skills is particularly noteworthy. In a globalised world, soft skills, i.e. interpersonal skills such as communication, leadership and teamwork, are absolutely essential. The relevance of soft skills in today's world can hardly be overestimated. In an increasingly networked working world, these skills are becoming more and more important. Employees working across the globe need to understand and deal with cultural differences in order to be successful.

Despite the many advantages, the metaverse should be carefully designed as a new workplace and continuing training platform in the interests of all stakeholders. There are already innovative approaches that are responsibly meeting this challenge. This applies, for example, to the software-as-a-service solution called XR Trainer from straightlabs, a company that specialises in immersive soft skills training in the metaverse. The virtual training is ready for immediate use without requiring any expensive development work. This solution is not only efficient and cost-effective, but also highly interactive and offers realistic training experiences. XR Trainer is already being used by international corporations.

The multilingual approach and cross-platform compatibility [it can be used with a VR headset, on a PC or en route using a smartphone] mean that companies can easily make the software available to an infinite number of employees regardless of their current location. Scientific studies and customer success stories emphasise the effectiveness of this solution.

A recent study in the automotive supply industry shows how immersive technology and this software can be used to make employee training on intercultural competence in international projects more efficient and sustainable. Employees report an increase in motivation and commitment. In combination with learning analytics, i.e. the measurement and analysis of data from learners and their contexts, learners are offered individualised help. In the future, AI algorithms will be able to support learning needs and preferences.

Looking to the future, virtual learning worlds in the metaverse have the potential to fundamentally change corporate learning. The transition to virtual learning spaces can significantly improve learning outcomes, understanding and skill development. Virtual worlds for soft skills training can be used not only to promote intercultural understanding, but also to help create a more integrative and efficient working environment. As technology continues to evolve and become more widely accepted in the business world, the metaverse will undoubtedly play an increasingly important role in the continuing education of the future.

straightlabs GmbH & Co. KG



*Bildungswerk der Baden-
Württembergischen
Wirtschaft e. V.*



In-company training as a springboard to employment

According to a global survey conducted by the Bildungswerk der Baden-Württembergischen Wirtschaft (Biwe), a lack of sales success is a major obstacle to growth for companies worldwide. Cross-industry qualifications in sales and marketing therefore have the potential to create additional jobs in many places. This is one of the reasons why Biwe organises sales and sales training courses that develop both participants' methodological skills and their social skills.

Since 2017, Biwe has been supporting SOS Children's Villages Rwanda (funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ, via sequa gGmbH) as part of a vocational training partnership in tapping new sources of income to finance its mission of giving children in need a loving home, empowering them to shape their own future and strengthening families. In this context, sales training for employees of Rwandan companies took place for the first time at the SOS Children's Villages vocational training centre in Kigali on 19 and 20 February 2020.

As in Germany, qualified sales staff are rare in Rwanda. This is not only a critical bottleneck for companies, but also an opportunity for young professionals and long-serving employees alike to advance their careers by gaining further qualifications. Biwe provides needs-based support in various formats.

Building on this experience, the partners began to jointly organise sales training courses in Rwanda, combined with internships in suitable companies. This took place as part of the German government's Special Initiative "Decent Work for a Just Transition", again funded by the BMZ via sequa gGmbH.

The results of the first group were consistently positive, as 78 out of 80 participants were placed in jobs according to the company survey. In October 2022, SOS Children's Villages Nigeria and Biwe therefore launched a sales trainee programme in Edo State as part of the Career Orientation and Job Placement [CoJoP] partnership project, financed by BMZ via GIZ GmbH.

To date, 360 young people have taken part in a one-week kick-off training programme on interdisciplinary skills (including soft skills) in the area of sales/marketing. By December 2022, 150 of them had started a four-month internship in a company. To further develop and strengthen their competences, including soft skills, they attended a sales training course one day a week during this internship phase on topics such as active listening, the marketing mix, material development using the AIDA principle, the telephone as a sales tool, the structured sales process and structuring solutions with the precision matrix.

The companies in which the participants completed their internships belonged to very different sectors: the sale of organic products, pharmaceuticals, fashion, consulting, sales branding and marketing agencies, and also agriculture. The aim was for the participants to be taken on by the companies.

The successes in various countries and a look at job advertisements worldwide suggest that sales training programmes that take soft skills into account, combined with internships, can help to place people in employment in different countries.

Understanding and training soft skills interculturally

Soft skills should provide employees and managers with the ability to successfully apply their technical expertise. To achieve this, the soft skills – and of course the way they are taught – must be adapted to the context, the country, the future users and their culture. What makes people successful in Germany – whether as an engineer, IT specialist, carer or carpenter – also makes someone else successful somewhere in the world – but not in exactly the same way. It is necessary to present, negotiate, listen and plan almost everywhere, but the same recipe does not always lead to success.

Soft skills training is therefore not a product that can be taken out and sold unchanged for other countries. It is important to know and consider not only the target group and their existing knowledge, but also their context and cultural characteristics. The customised training courses offered by APPLICATIO Training & Management are based on such experience.

Moderator training in Mongolia

An example from Mongolia shows that language may not present the only challenge in further training programmes. Even basic definitions and concepts can lead to ambiguities that need to be cleared up. APPLICATIO trained local moderators in the field on behalf of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The individuals involved were expected to contribute to the planning and coordination of measures in development projects of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

However, before the relevant methodological and social soft skills for moderators such as presentation techniques, communication, constructive feedback and moderation techniques could be taught, a detailed definition of terms was first required. The term “moderator” does exist in Mongolian, but only as the host of a television programme. No-one in the training course could make any sense of the meaning “mediator, guide” derived from Latin. The term first had to be “loaded” with new meaning in intensive dis-

cussions. Only then could the necessary skills (and also attitude and mindset) be successfully and sustainably derived and communicated together with the participants.

The culture determines the “correct” use of soft skills

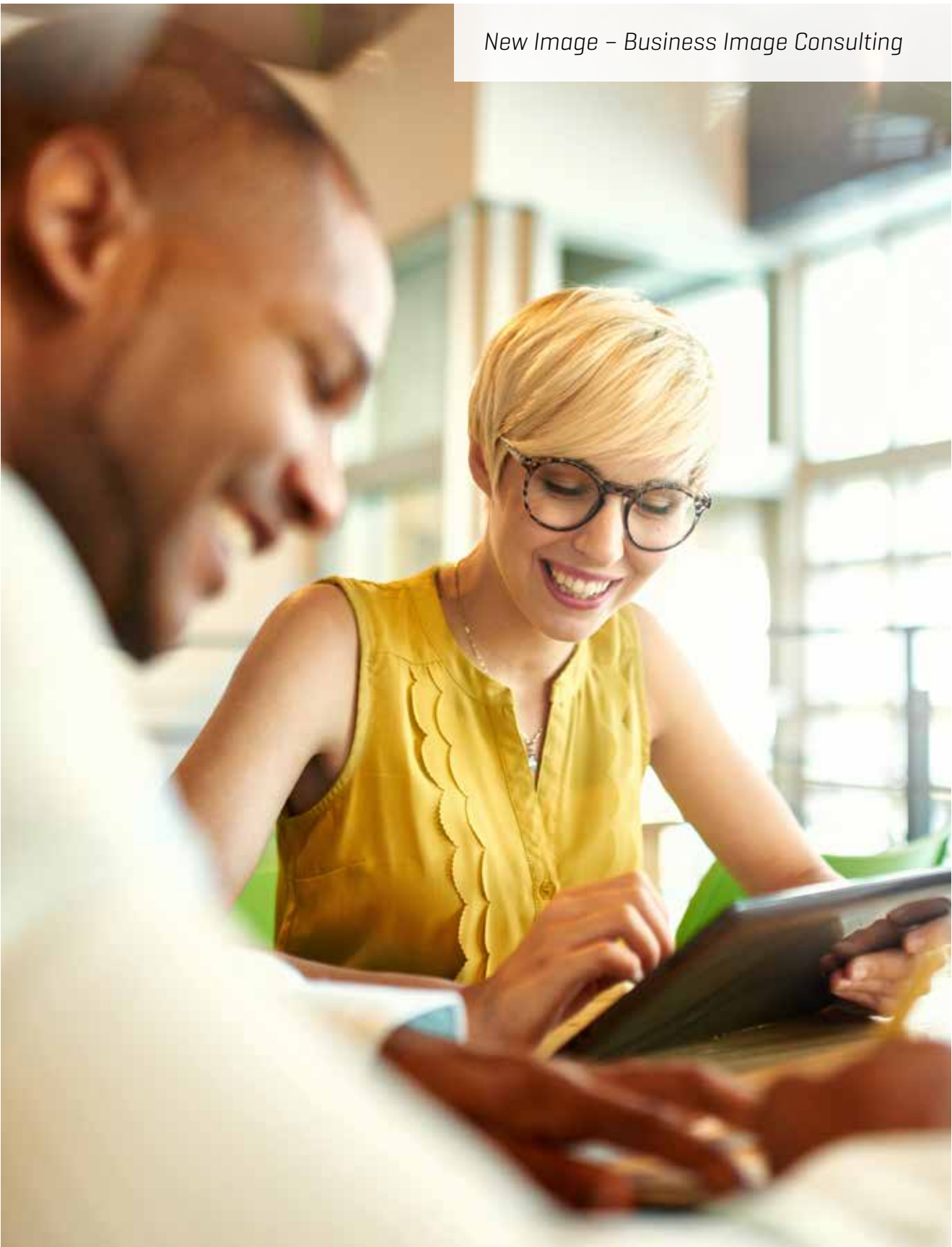
Even the most basic soft skills need to be scrutinised in a cultural context and discussed at least while they are being taught. The rule for feedback, for example, is that it should be constructive, positive and appreciative. However, if criticism is wrapped up in hymns of praise to such an extent that it is not recognisable as criticism, as is common in some cultures, only the positive aspects remain in the end and there is no critical self-reflection.

Respectful criticism between equals may also fall victim to other rules of behaviour deeply rooted in a certain culture. This is the case, for example, in societies in which the eldest, due to their age, or the superior, due to their hierarchical level, is generally considered more likely to be right than younger people or subordinates and, in principle, is not allowed to be criticised at all.

Time management is also a soft skill and plays an important role in many projects. You need to meet reporting deadlines, draw up schedules and activity plans, fill them with life, and so on. However, it is of little use to teach time management methods to a selected group of people in a country where communication is primarily face-to-face and constant traffic jams would make a mockery of any schedule even before it is created.

For this reason, training providers such as APPLICATIO Training & Management always pay attention to the distinction between “doing the right thing” and “doing something right” when teaching soft skills. Only training providers who understand and accept their mediating role within a cultural context can help course participants to successfully take on new roles.







Traditional virtues and emotional intelligence are considered valuable resources
www.new-image.de

Adult education is increasingly focussing on soft skills

The training provider New Image® trains employees of large and medium-sized companies, clinics and hotels in service quality, communication, positive self-presentation, business dress code and competence in Arabic culture – both in their home country and abroad.

Soft skills in these areas are seen as the key to dealing with issues in the world of work that many people struggle with for years. Despite a high level of professional competence, good to very good educational qualifications and numerous further training courses, they are standing still in terms of their careers. For the long-awaited promotion or the vacant position, others are chosen who are often not nearly as well qualified.

The reason is that more and more employers and trainers are complaining not only about low motivation and a lack of stamina among employees, but above all about deficits in social behaviour, good manners and basic conduct such as politeness, punctuality, decency, hygiene and a well-groomed appearance.

Ultimately, this involves what we refer to as the “old virtues” and the values associated with them. People today are experiencing a shift in values, a change in social and individual norms and ideals. But qualities such as reliability, humanity, humour and cordiality are still considered more trustworthy and therefore make people more successful. This shows that soft skills can be responsible for prejudices and likeability, failure or success.

Human resources as a corporate task

The promotion and further qualification of their “human resources” is a central task for companies. Further training, retraining, reintegration, outplacement, training, coaching and consulting play a major role here. Many companies also train their customers and thus not only offer good service, but also strengthen the “bond” with them.

In future, adult education in companies will focus much more on soft skills: personality development, knowledge of human nature, leadership strategies and self-management. Experience shows that bad-tempered and unhappy employees are not only annoying, but also detrimental to business.

Emotional intelligence as a career building block and business tool

The “gut feeling”, which was often ridiculed in the business world 30 years ago, has been given a new name and is now regarded as a valued business tool: emotional intelligence. Although everyone has it, many people do not use this valuable resource, or use it far too rarely. Many people still live by the principle that you have to be strong, always cool and not show any emotions in the tough day-to-day business world.

This poses a particular challenge for managers, as they receive less feedback on their own behaviour. The result is an uncritical self-image and a deficit in self-awareness and self-responsible behaviour. The basis of all successful communication and interaction is knowing who you are and how you come across and could come across to others. New Image offers efficient training programmes for this purpose.



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